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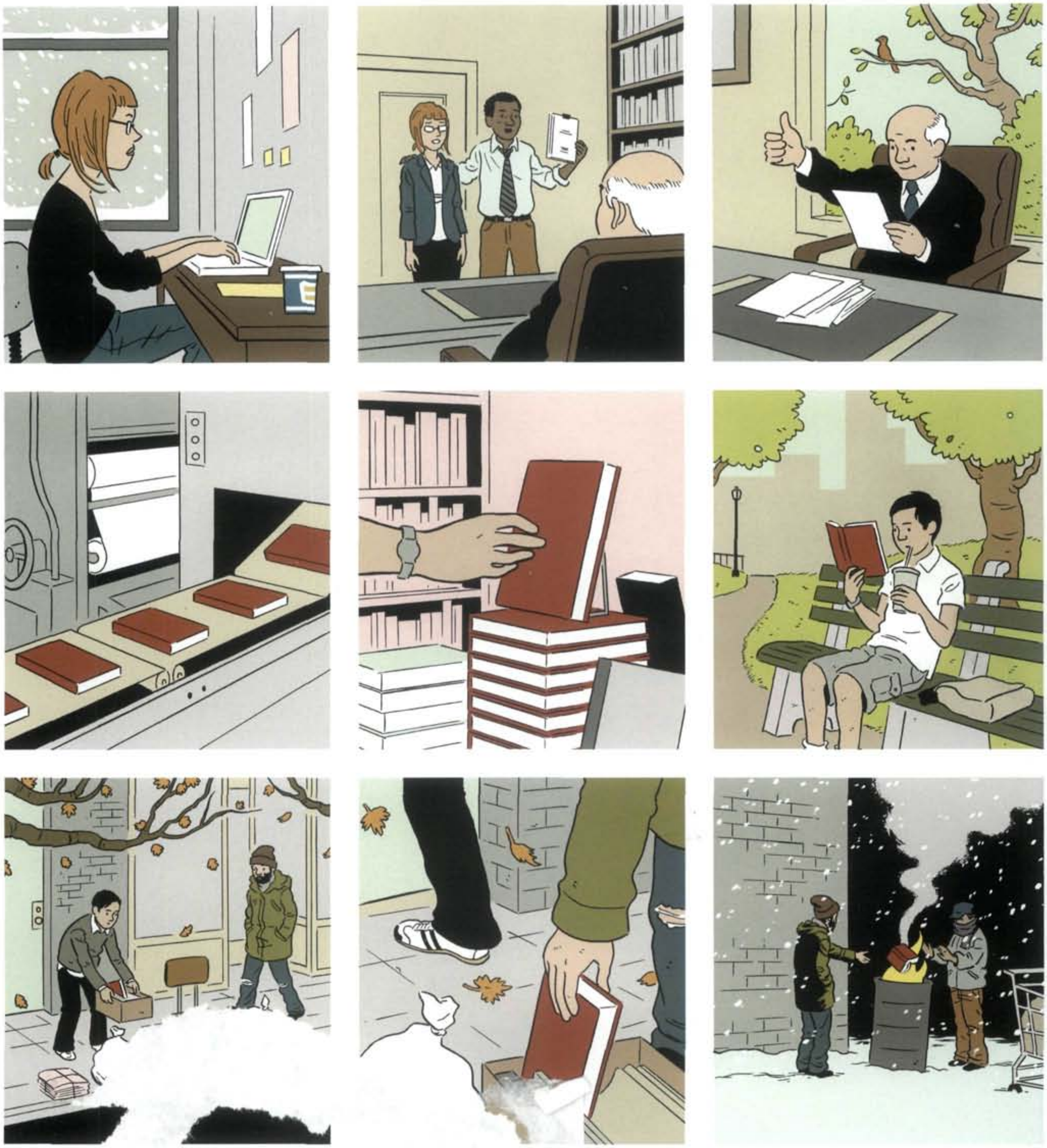
THE NEW YORKER

FEB. 25, 2008



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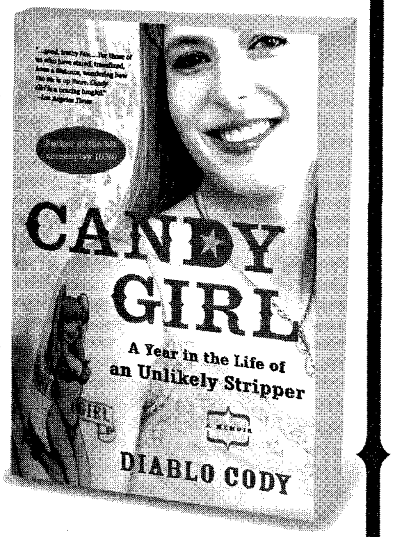
Before the Academy Award nomination for her hit screenplay

JUNO,

Diablo Cody took a yearlong walk on the wild side.

THIS IS HER STORY.


Author of the hit screenplay JUNO
CANDY GIRL
A Year in the Life of an Unlikely Stripper
A MEMOIR
DIABLO CODY

"Clearly a writer of unique sass."
★ *Entertainment Weekly*

"Sharp and funny."
★ Associated Press

"Cody's prose snaps like a garter belt. . . good, frothy fun. . . . For those of us who have stared, transfixed, from a distance, wondering how the air is up there, *Candy Girl* is a bracing lungful."
★ *Los Angeles Times*

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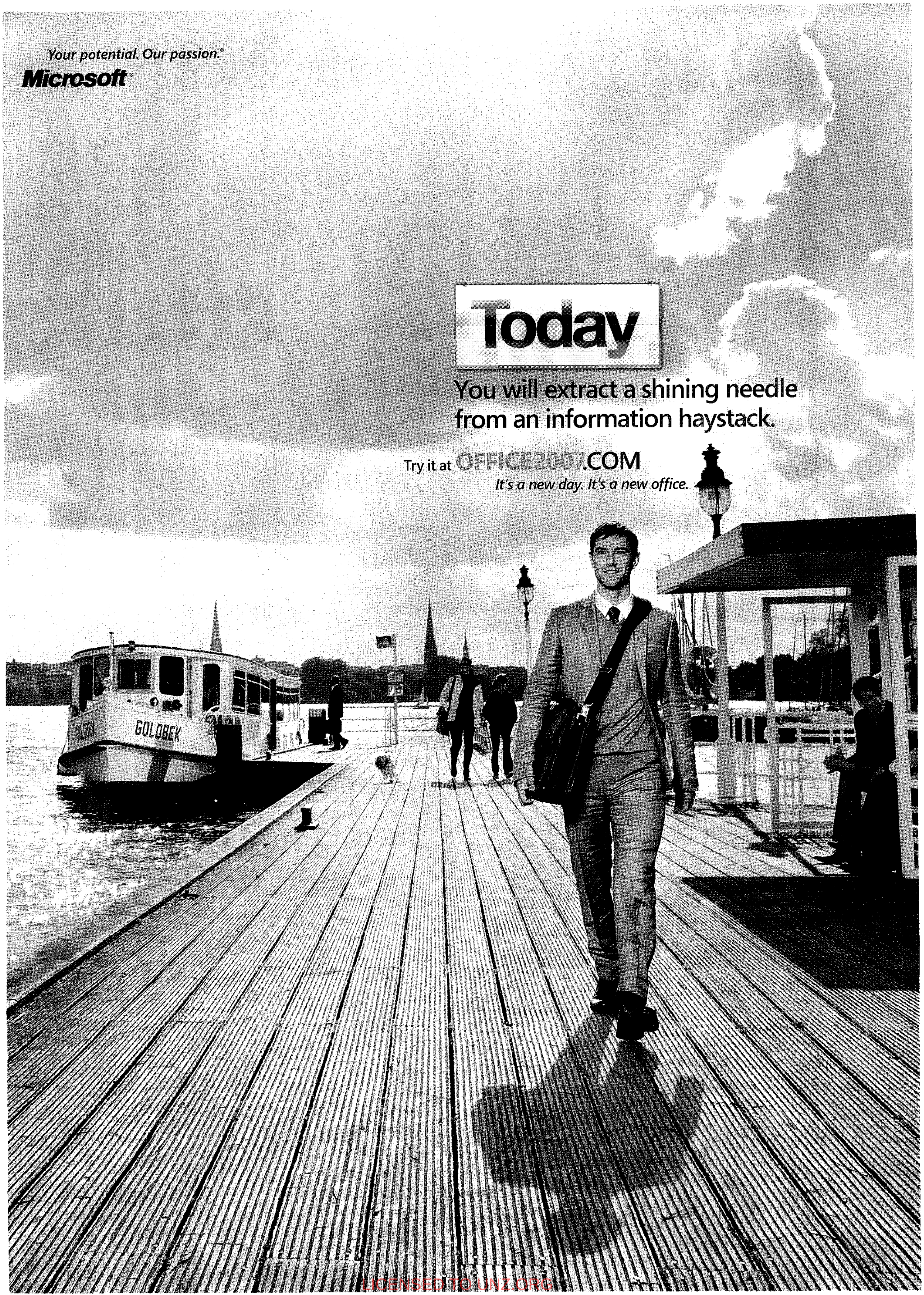

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Larissa MacFarquhar ("East Side Story," p. 54) has been a staff writer since 1998.

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Salman Rushdie (Fiction, p. 64) is the author of ten novels, including "The Enchantress of Florence," which will be published in June.

David Denby (A Critic at Large, p. 72) is a film critic for the magazine. His books include "Great Books" and "American Sucker."

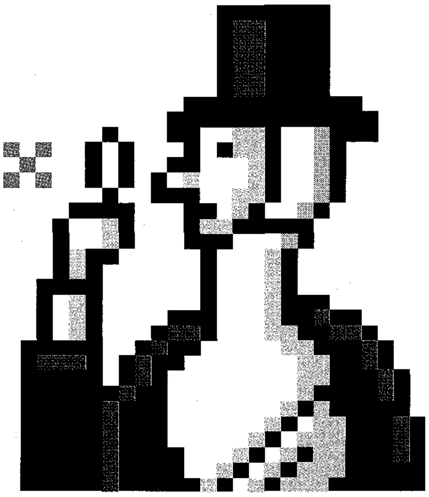
Elizabeth Kolbert (Books, p. 77) co-edited, with Francis Spufford, "The Ends of the Earth: An Anthology of the Finest Writing on the Arctic and the Antarctic," which was published in October.

Peter Schjeldahl (The Art World, p. 82) has a collection of art criticism, entitled "Let's See," coming out in May.

Adrian Tomine (Cover) is a writer and illustrator who has published five books, including, most recently, "Shortcomings." This is his fourth cover for the magazine.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

Ryan Lizza and *Hendrik Hertzberg* on the Campaign Trail podcast, hosted by *Dorothy Wickenden.* / The Naked Campaign videos, featuring *Steve Brodner.* / *Michael Specter* talks about carbon footprints. / *Sasha Frere-Jones* blogs about pop music. / Goings On, our new culture blog. / *Michael Maslin* sketches his path to becoming a cartoonist. / Art by Cai Guo-Qiang. / From the archives: *Jane Mayer* on torture, *Pauline Kael* and *Ethan Coen* on "Blood Simple," and *David Denby* and *Anthony Lane* review the nominees for Best Picture. / Animated cartoons and the caption contest.



THE MAIL

A RAY OF SUNSHINE

Mark Ulriksen's "Winter Pleasures," an impressionistic rendering of Grand Central Terminal's main concourse, depicts the famous golden clock bathed in sunlight (Cover, January 28th). Note that this can be only an eastward morning scene, not a westward afternoon. The angle of the long axis of the concourse, following that of Manhattan's east-west streets, is not 90° but 119° east of north, and aligns with the sun through its "west" windows only from late May to early July, and then only at an elevation of less than 3°. But aren't those the south-side ticket windows at the left of the picture, with the tracks and trains therefore on the right? And doesn't the clock seem to read three-fifty, hardly a time for the morning sun? I take the picture to be deliberately reversed, so that the clock really reads (a backward) eight-ten, precisely the time of the sun's direct morning illumination of Grand Central's east windows on (or about) February 19th. As all Grand Central lovers know, the great mural of stars painted on the Terminal's ceiling is oddly arranged, with an east-to-west reversal of the zodiac, with Taurus charging Orion from left to right. (It is still a matter of debate whether the mural is a mistaken execution of a printed floor plan or the adapted design of an Old World star map, rendered according to the medieval custom of an external projection of a celestial globe.) Now, in Ulriksen's alternate-universe image of Grand Central's cosmos-within-a-cosmos, the constellations will be set back as we see them in the starry night sky.

Michael Allison
Adjunct Professor of Astronomy
Columbia University
Emeritus Scientist, Goddard Institute for Space Studies
New York City

THE AESTHETIC TRADITION

John Currin is only one of a long line of male artists to resort to a genre that often degrades women, and the result is fairly predictable, seemingly allied more with conservative than with progressive values ("Lifting the Veil," by Calvin Tomkins, January 28th). After all, Currin's choice of subject matter is a logical step along the continuum that began with the female nudes of the Venetian Renaissance (the sixteenth-century version of Currin's nudes, since they were courtesans). It's not really avant-garde at all.

Ann Storey
Professor of Art History
The Evergreen State College
Olympia, Wash.

I agree with Tomkins that Currin's painting, stylistically and technically, has matured over the years. It is a contemporary anomaly that some of our best young artists grow up in public; historically, they have had to go through a long apprenticeship before being considered worthy. Growing up in the heyday of Abstract Expressionism, I and many other art students sought out those few schools that still offered traditional instruction in classical European painting methods such as underpainting, grisaille, glazes, and anatomy, along with the latest abstract and conceptual ideas. Ironically, because of our technical sophistication, drawing skills, and lack of angst, our art was often considered suspect. But we found, as has John Currin, that the time spent gaining this hard-won fluency allowed our paintings to grow in expression and range as we matured. Perhaps the public is beginning to realize that you do not have to mumble to be an artist. The maturing of Currin is paradoxical in that as his formal, visual language becomes more refined and less crude his subject matter seems to be going in the opposite direction. Still, it is good to see an artist being appreciated for letting go of the language of adolescence, if not the spirit.

Robert Neffson
New York City

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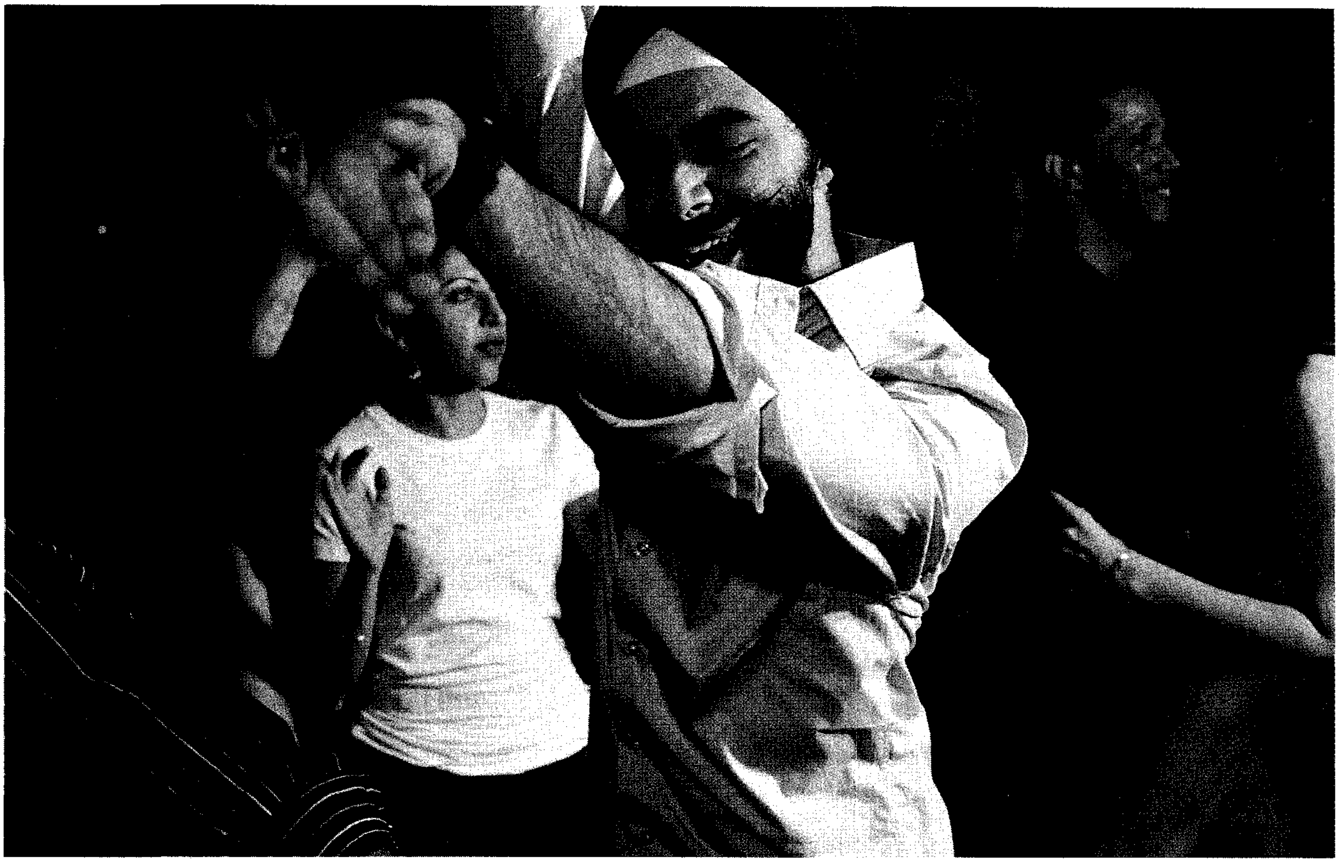


Basement Bhangra, at S.O.B.'s. Photograph by Brian Finke.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
24	25	26	20	21	22	23

THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
ROMAN À CLEF

Richard Nelson, who wrote the book for "Chess" and wrote and directed "James Joyce's The Dead," has a new play, "Conversations in Tusculum," at the Public. The drama, about the assassination of Julius Caesar, stars Brian Dennehy and Aidan Quinn. (See page 8.)

NIGHT LIFE
THE ITALIAN JOB

In recent years, the trumpeter Enrico Rava and the pianist Stefano Bollani have delivered albums that mix delicacy and flintiness, including "Tati," a trio release with the drummer Paul Motian. Their new collaboration, "The Third Man," is an intimate duo recording, but at Birdland they'll have additional muscle on hand: the band includes Motian, the bassist Larry Grenadier, and, for the last two nights, the saxophonist Mark Turner. (See page 14.)

ART
INDUSTRIAL STRENGTH

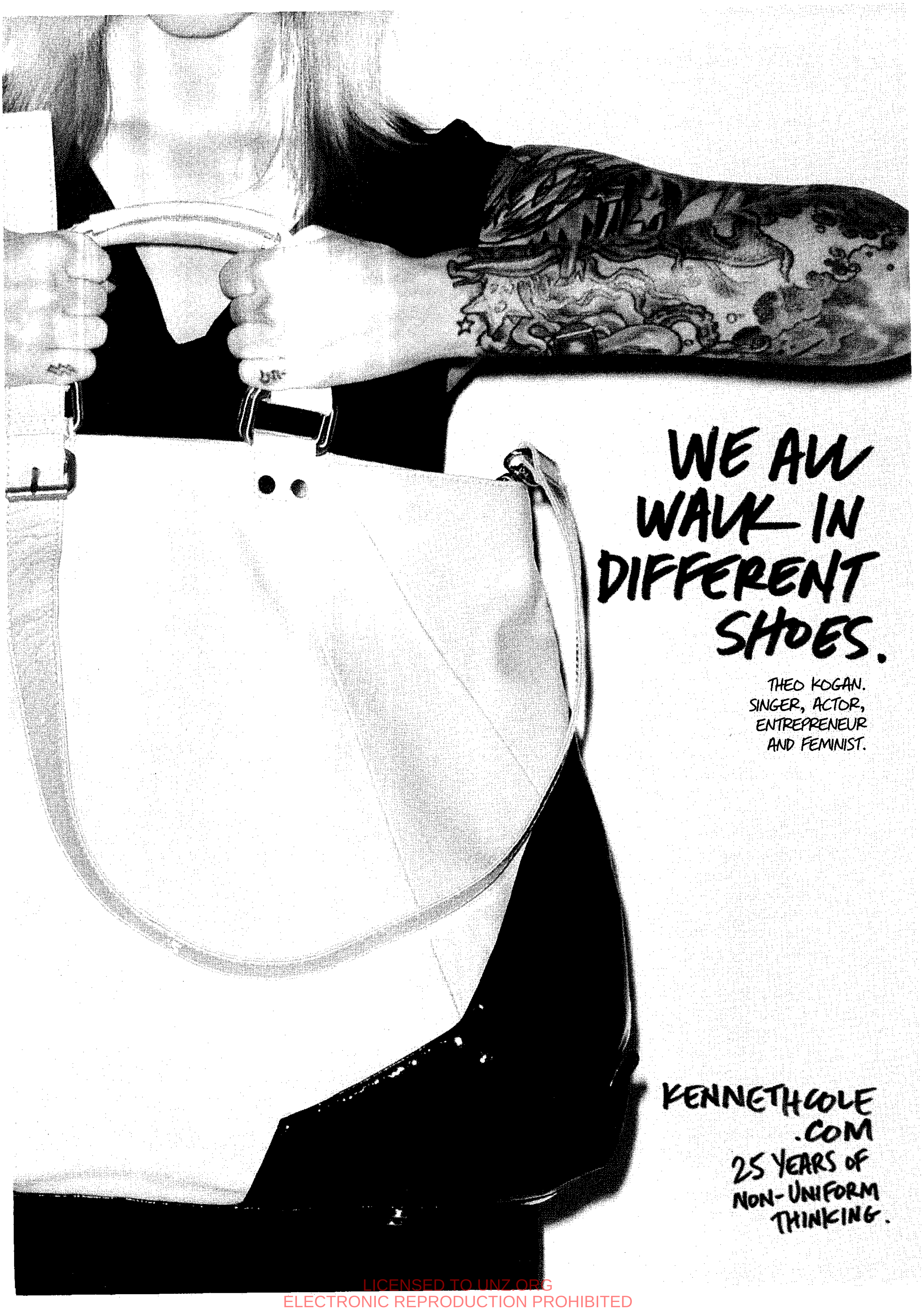
At the end of his life, the painter Charles Demuth found a new muse amid the grain elevators and smokestacks of his Pennsylvania home town. Six of his Precisionist canvases from that era are on view in "Chimneys and Towers: Charles Demuth's Late Paintings of Lancaster," at the Whitney. (See page 14.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
EASTERN EXPOSURE

Many Asian composers keep their traditions in mind while investigating new sounds. This year's "Music from Japan" festival features performances of ancient *gagaku* music and of modern works by Takemitsu and Nakagawa. (See page 18.)

MOVIES
FAR AND AWAY

The writers and editors at *Film Comment* are showcasing films from around the world, whether undistributed or in première. They include "Schindler's Houses," a documentary about low-cost housing of bygone days; Lukas Moodysson's experimental "Container"; and "Before I Forget," a drama of sexual abandon written and directed by—and starring—Jacques Nolot. (See page 21.)



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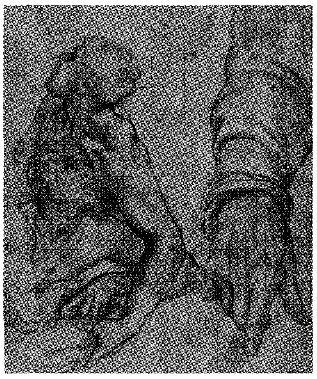


BRONZINO, "STUDY OF TWO NUDE HALF FIGURES AND A RIGHT ARM" (UFFIZI)

Salute the Florentine Renaissance and the (mostly) Mannerist masters in "Michelangelo, Vasari, and Their Contemporaries: Drawings from the Uffizi," at the Morgan Library. Michelangelo is all of any thesaurus's entries under "strength"; Andrea del Sarto, a habit of beauty; Pontormo, poetry in overdrive; Bronzino, go argue; Francesco Salviati, voluptuary punch; Baccio Bandinelli, pressure under grace. Then there's Giorgio Vasari, the great biographer and painter of unsinkable mediocrity, whose work dominates the show. He knew practically everything about how to draw, just not why. But he is featured, rightly, as a promulgator of Renaissance ideals and a pioneering connoisseur of drawings, who enlisted numerous artists, all of them better than he was, in the decoration of the home of the Medici dukes, the Palazzo Vecchio. Compare his bland punctilio with the rippling zest of his close collaborator, the Flemish-born Giovanni Stradanus. No Salieri, Vasari seems to have been a perfect shepherd of creative egoists, sweetly unenvious and never a threat.

—*Peter Schjeldahl*

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

ADDING MACHINE
A musical based on a 1923 Expressionist play by Elmer Rice, about an exemplary employee who is replaced by a mechanical device. With a score by Joshua Schmidt and a libretto by Schmidt and Jason Loewith. David Cromer directs. In previews. Opens Feb. 25. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane. 212-307-4100.)

CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF
Debbie Allen directs the Tennessee Williams play, about a dysfunctional Mississippi family. Terrence Howard, Anika Noni Rose, James Earl Jones, Phylicia Rashad, and Giancarlo Esposito star. In previews. (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

CONVERSATIONS IN TUSCULUM
The Public presents a new drama about Julius Caesar, written and directed by Richard Nelson. Aidan Quinn, Brian Dennehy, David Strathairn, Gloria Reuben, Joe Grifasi, and Maria Tucci star. In previews. (425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

DEAD MAN'S CELL PHONE
The New York première of Sarah Ruhl's play, about a woman who answers the cell phone of a dead man and becomes involved with his family. Starring Mary-Louise Parker, Kathleen Chalfant, and Bill Camp. Anne Bogart directs. In previews. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THE FIFTH COLUMN
The Mint presents the world première of this play by Ernest Hemingway, written in 1937, about a spy in Madrid during the Spanish Civil War. Jonathan Bank directs. Previews begin Feb. 26. (311 W. 43rd St. 212-315-0231.)

IN THE HEIGHTS
The Off Broadway musical, which depicts a microcosm of the Latino community of Washington Heights, moves to Broadway. With music and lyrics by Lin-Manuel Miranda and a book by Quiara Alegria Hudes. Thomas Kail directs. In previews. (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200.)

JAMAICA, FAREWELL
Debra Ehrhardt stars in her autobiographical play, about leaving her home country. Wallace Norman directs. Previews begin Feb. 22. (SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-691-1555.)

LIBERTY CITY
Jessica Blank and April Yvette Thompson wrote this play, performed by Thompson and directed by Blank, about Thompson, the daughter of a Bahamian-Cuban father and an African-American mother in Miami. In previews. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

LIFE IN A MARITAL INSTITUTION
James Braly wrote and performs this monologue about marriage and counselling. Hal Brooks directs. In previews. Opens Feb. 24. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

PARADISE PARK
Signature Theatre Company presents a new play by Charles Mee, about a fictional amusement park. In previews. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

PARLOUR SONG
Emily Mortimer, Chris Bauer, and Jonathan Cake star in the world première of Jez Butterworth's drama, about a man who becomes paranoid that his wife is stealing from him. Neil Pepe directs the Atlantic Theatre Company production. In previews. (336 W. 20th St. 212-279-4200.)

PASSING STRANGE
The rock musical by Stew and Heidi Rodewald, about a young middle-class black man who finds himself in bohemian Europe, gets transferred to Broadway. The original cast, including Daniel Breaker, remains intact. Annie Dorsen directs; choreography by Karole Armitage. In previews. (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE SEAGULL
Dianne Wiest and Alan Cumming star in the Chekhov play, translated by Paul Schmidt. Viacheslav Dolgachev directs. In previews. (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 212-352-3101.)

SUNDAY IN THE PARK WITH GEORGE
Roundabout Theatre Company mounts the Stephen Sondheim–James Lapine musical from 1984, inspired by Georges Seurat's most famous painting. Daniel Evans and Jenna Russell star. Sam Buntrock directs. In previews. Opens Feb. 21. (Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-239-6200.)

U.S. DRAG
The StageFARM presents a play by Gina Gionfriddo, about two recent college graduates looking for a criminal. Trip Cullman directs. Previews begin Feb. 23. (Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4100.)

NOW PLAYING

BETRAYED
George Packer's play, based on a 2007 article that he wrote for this magazine, provides an intimate view into the lives of Iraqi interpreters who worked with the U.S. government in Baghdad and then found themselves unprotected when sectarian violence threatened their safety. Adnan (Waleed F. Zuaiter) and Laith (Sevan Greene) meet at the Palestine Hotel to strategize about how best to proceed; as they wait, anxiously, for a phone call from a friend at the State Department, they remember key moments from the 2003 invasion of Baghdad to the present, which are acted out in flashbacks. Though the dialogue can be exposition-heavy, Packer's strength as a reporter makes up for his inexperience as a playwright—the writing is rich with humor and pathos, brought to life by the very talented actors under the skillful direction of Pippin Parker. (Culture Project, 55 Mercer St. 212-352-3101.)

CRIMES OF THE HEART
Kathleen Turner directs Beth Henley's play from 1979. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

GRACE
Lynn Redgrave stars in a drama by Mick Gordon and A. C. Grayling, about an atheist professor whose son wants to become a Christian minister. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

HUNTING AND GATHERING
In Brooke Berman's wistful comedy, the Craigslist generation searches for love among the ruins of the New York real-estate market. Jittery Ruth (Keira Naughton), an inveterate sublettor, keeps her belongings in storage; her best friend, the easygoing Astor (a pitch-perfect Michael Chernus), has fine-tuned the art of crashing on couches. Both envy the two-bedroom lifestyle enjoyed by Jesse (Jeremy Shamos), a Columbia professor who is both Astor's brother and Ruth's ex, but deep down they know their tenderhearted species can't thrive in moneyed Manhattan. Under Leigh Silverman's elegant direction, Berman's unassuming tale grows into something unexpected: a moving morality play about the hearts—and finances—of the young. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

MACBETH
Patrick Stewart reprises his Chichester Festival Theatre performance as the power-hungry general. Rupert Goold directs. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100.)

NEXT TO NORMAL
Tom Kitt and Brian Yorkey's musical centers on a stock nuclear family whose everyday problems become a full-blown meltdown. The characters are familiar: there's the Valium-popping mom (Alice Ripley), the perfectionist daughter (Jennifer Damiano), a father (Brian d'Arcy James) "living on a latte and a prayer," and a teen-age son (Aaron Tveit) who is not exactly what he seems. The rest of them, for the most part, are exactly what they seem, since Yorkey's lyrics never liberate them from their archetypal roots. But the production is heightened by the electric staging of Michael Greif, a swanky three-tiered set by Mark Wendland, and Ripley, who, with a combina-

Ordinary is:
making you
feel at home
EXtraordinary is:
whisking you away
to another world
INFINITI

tion of humor, grit, and grace, is able to make her generic part poignant and specific. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

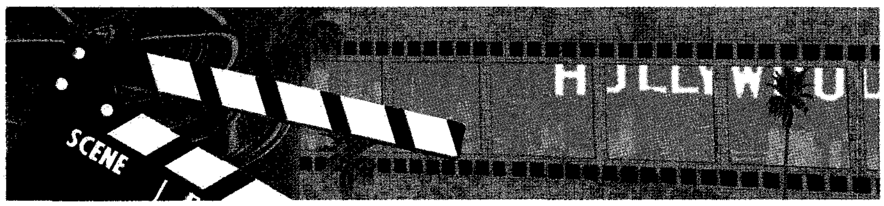
OROONOKO
Biyi Bandele's adaptation of Aphra Behn's novel from 1688 is a slave narrative retold as something like an Elizabethan tragedy. In heated scenes stuffed with florid speeches, Bandele tells the story of Oroonoko (Albert Jones), the warrior prince of a West African kingdom, who marries Imoinda (Toi Perkins) without the consent of the king, his grandfather. This sticky situation lands the couple on a Surinamese sugar plantation in the second act, where Oroonoko takes the helm of a slave uprising. Kate Whoriskey's handsome staging rolls along to the sound of tribal drums and never lets the high-stakes plot go slack. But the story is missing a psychological third dimension, favoring adrenaline for nuance in a genre that has seen far more complex outings. (The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010.)

THE SLUG BEARERS OF KAYROL ISLAND (OR, THE FRIENDS OF DR. RUSHOWER)
Ben Katchor and Mark Mulcahy's delightful musical fable tells the story of the Rushowers, a Manhattan family who discover the plight of third-world stevedores who transport the lead slugs that give our small appliances "the impression of heft and worth." Gorgeous, semi-animated projections of Katchor's art work, bursting with color and shown on three large screens, function both as sets and as part of the action. Though the cast is uneven—Peter Friedman is terrific as Dr. Rushower, Matt Pearson makes a strangely aloof slug bearer—and the plot misfires a bit in the second act, the show succeeds on the strength of Katchor's imagination and Mulcahy's outstanding jazz-inflected score, performed live by a four-piece band. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303.)

WAR
In his 2003 drama about a family shattered by an unspecified genocide, the Swedish playwright Lars Norén keeps his surfaces deliberately nebulous. A mother, two damaged daughters, and a blind father (a recently returned prisoner of war) huddle in a stone structure somewhere in Eastern Europe, in a village ravaged by bombs, rape, and death. When they talk, they spit out brittle chunks of vague language; every exchange is a form of combat. Norén wants his play to contain eternity in an hour, but Anders Cato's wobbly production can't deliver: the actors seem like Americans playing refugees, and their robust personalities overwhelm the deracinated material. (Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444.)

Also Playing

AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY: Imperial, 245 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **A BRONX TALE:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. Through Feb. 24. **THE COLOR PURPLE:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200. Through Feb. 24. **THE FARNSWORTH INVENTION:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE HOMECOMING:** Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **IS HE DEAD?:** Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **NOVEMBER:** Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **OFFENDING THE AUDIENCE:** Flea, 41 White St. 212-352-3101. Through Feb. 23. **ROCK 'N' ROLL:** Bernard B. Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE SEAFARER:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **SPEECH & DEBATE:** Roundabout Underground, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300. Through Feb. 24. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.



DVD NOTES
A LONG, STRANGE TRIP

It's unjust that the Academy didn't nominate Wes Anderson's **"The Darjeeling Limited"** (Fox) in any category, but inexplicable that they didn't invent a special one for it: Best Luggage. An exquisite set of suitcases, credited to Marc Jacobs for Louis Vuitton, plays a large role in this blissful, loopy comedy of family anguish and sublimated tenderness.

The film's subject is coming home, and it's a sign of Anderson's comic genius that it takes a picaresque jaunt through India by three brothers, estranged since their father's funeral a year ago, to do so. The domineering Francis (Owen Wilson), who is recovering from a motorcycle accident, has convened the other two—Peter (Adrien Brody), a regular guy in a panic over the impending birth of his first child, and Jack (Jason Schwartzman), a literary romantic trapped in a troubled relationship—for a "spiritual journey," which he plans down to the minute.

The trip brings odd misadventure, off-kilter romance, and sudden danger, but the real story involves coming to terms with a lifetime of ingrained resentments plus grief of more recent vintage. For Anderson, such troubles are too big to blurt out without bathos and ridicule. Following other Wasp modernists such as Hemingway and Howard Hawks, he relies on high style, sly gestures, and arch pranks to evoke intense emotion with bite and grace. His tight, sketchlike structures bring out the best in his actors, especially Schwartzman (who co-wrote the script with Anderson and Roman Coppola), a Dustin Hoffman for our time, who doles out Zen wisdom with a carnal leer. In Anderson's world of brothers without sisters, the ribald rituals of male bonding suggest the unfathomable otherness of women—including the trio's mother (Anjelica Huston), whose life haunts them no less than their father's death and who turns out to be the real reason for their trip.

Where people prove elusive, material things play an outsized, totemic role. The brothers' grudges emerge in their wrangling over their father's relics—glasses, keys, toiletries—but pride of place goes to his luggage. Dark tan, finely tooled, and adorned with a faux-naïf intaglio of wild animals, it follows them around on their journey at great inconvenience, a perfect, literal metaphor for their heavy emotional baggage.

The film begins with a neat dose of backstory: a short preface, featuring Jack holed up in a luxurious Paris hotel before his passage to India, where he receives a surprise visit from the woman he adores (Natalie Portman, chomping a toothpick, her hair cropped martially short). Movingly, stoically, whimsically, Anderson suggests the difficult self-restraint and self-mastery that the most intimate relationships demand. Love, in his book, is tolerance and acceptance—facing up to pain in order to take the pleasure that's given.

—*Richard Brody*

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

"AMERICAN SONGBOOK"
Feb. 20: The **Punch Brothers**, a new band led by the mandolinist Chris Thile, recently of Nickel Creek. The other Brothers—Greg Garrison on bass, Gabe Witcher on fiddle, Chris Eldridge on guitar, and Noam Pikelny on banjo—are a seasoned bunch. They each have solid careers of their own, and they first got together for Thile's 2006 record, "How to Grow a Woman from the Ground." This performance coincides with the release of the group's album, "Punch," which, like the band itself, takes its name from a Mark Twain story. Feb. 21: **Grace Potter** and the **Nocturnals** roll down from their home in the mountains of Vermont for a night of blues rock. Feb. 22: The eternally eerie jazz vocalist **Jimmy Scott.** Feb. 23: **John Lloyd Young,** who won a Tony for his role as Frankie Valli in "Jersey Boys," looks back to the sixties and seventies. (Allen Room, Rose Theatre, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500.)

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Feb. 20: In the late eighties, **Winger,** lead by the photogenic Kip Winger, specialized in radio-friendly heavy metal. Their music fell out of fashion with the advent of grunge, and Winger himself was mocked by the metal community after posing for *Playgirl.* The band broke up in the early nineties, but Winger has since launched a comeback of sorts. Feb. 22: The soulful blues singer **Robert Cray.**

"BLARNEY STAR CONCERTS"
Glucksman Ireland House, New York University, 1 Washington Mews. (212-998-3950)—Feb. 22: **Mike Rafferty,** an octogenarian flutist and Uilleann-pipes player who grew up in Ballinakill, East Galway, is joined, as he often is, by his accordionist daughter, **Mary,** a veteran of the Irish supergroup Cherish the Ladies, and his son-in-law, **Dónal Clancy,** a guitarist and bouzouki player whose father, Liam, was one of the Clancy Brothers.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Feb. 24-25: The neo-psychedelic Welsh art rock of the **Super Furry Animals.**

BROOKLYN ACADEMY OF MUSIC
30 Lafayette Ave. (718-636-4100)—Feb. 22-23: The **National,** a tight quintet of Ohio transplants with a penchant for shimmering, au-courant indie rock, wraps up the second annual "Brooklyn Next" festival.

FILLMORE NEW YORK AT IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Feb. 24: **W.A.S.P.** Raiding the playbooks of Alice Cooper, Kiss, and the Plasmatics, this Los Angeles metal band (the name of which may or may not be an acronym for "We Are Sexual Perverts") gained notoriety twenty-five years ago for its puerile lyrics and shock-rock theatrics. The band's 1983 single "Animal (F**k Like a Beast)" sent Tipper Gore and the P.M.R.C. into a rage. Infamy ensued. Timeless music did not. Feb. 27-28: **Flogging Molly,** like their heroes the Pogues, spike traditional Irish folk music with adrenalin.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Feb. 20: Led by Julia Frodahl, a singer with a breathy, lithe delivery, the local ensemble **Edison Woods** crafts melodramatic chamber pop with a spooky edge. With the Portland, Oregon, based singer-songwriter **Holcombe Waller,** who is currently writing a new musical adaptation of Kahlil Gibran's "The Prophet." Feb. 26: The singer-songwriter **Jim White,** who made his début recording, "Wrong Eyed Jesus," just over a decade ago, pierces illusions as he delivers dark tall tales about folks at the margins of society. His subjects may be close to the gutter, but his musical sense is heavenly. His songs are as spacey as the characters that inhabit them. He's

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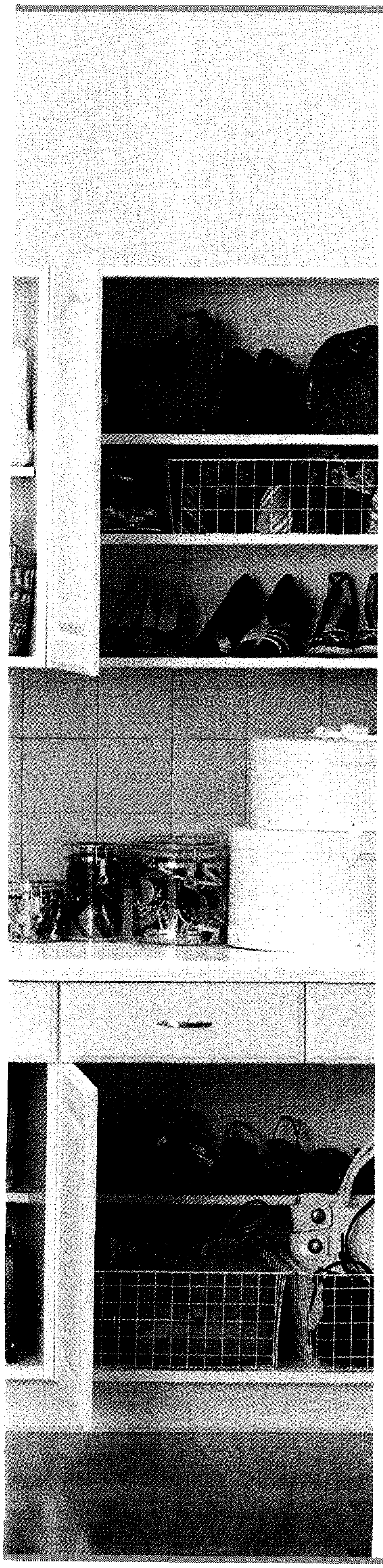

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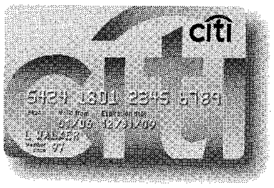

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here celebrating the release of his new album, "Transnormal Skiperoo," the sequel to his 2004 album, "Drill a Hole in That Substrate and Tell Me What You See."

MADISON SQUARE GARDEN
Seventh Ave. at 33rd St. (212-307-7171)—Feb. 21: **Linkin Park** started out by matching the foul angst and ersatz hip-hop posturing of bands like Korn and Limp Bizkit. It has since gone on to become an unlikely success story by swapping adolescent rage for world-weariness. Feb. 25-26 and Feb. 28: The classic rockers **Eric Clapton** and **Steve Winwood.**

SOUTHPAW
125 Fifth Ave., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-230-0236)—Feb. 23: The local country bandleader **Alex Battles** and his group, the **Whisky Rebellion,** celebrate what would have been Johnny Cash's seventy-sixth birthday. They'll be playing, in its entirety, "At Folsom Prison," which Cash recorded forty years ago in the cafeteria of the Northern California penitentiary.

TERMINAL 5
610 W. 56th St. (212-582-6600)—Feb. 21: The **Bravery,** a gaggle of young New Yorkers with a thing for hair gel, burst on the scene a few years ago with a sound that echoed the polished sheen of such eighties icons as Duran Duran and New Order. The band earned the scorn of music bloggers for its take on the modern-rock sound. To show just how influential those writers are, the boys sent the song "An Honest Mistake" rocketing up the charts. Since then, they have released a follow-up album, "The Sun & the Moon," which has been a similar success. They are about to put out another version of that record next month, featuring alternate versions of the songs.

TOWN HALL
123 W. 43rd St. (212-840-2824)—Feb. 21-24: Like a comet from a melancholic universe, the art-pop band the **Magnetic Fields,** which is led by the wry Yonkers native Stephin Merritt, returns every few years, with a new album and a run of shows. Its latest release, "Distortion," gives Merritt's carefully constructed melodies and dyspeptic lyrics a noisy, hard-rock edge.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—Through March 1: The former country hitmaker **Lari White** performs love songs from the Great American Songbook.

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Feb. 20-23: The trumpeter **Enrico Rava** and the pianist **Stefano Bollani** are joined by the brilliant drummer **Paul Motian,** the bassist **Larry Grenadier,** and, on the last two nights of the run, the saxophonist **Mark Turner,** as sterling a New York band as these two Italian masters could hope for.

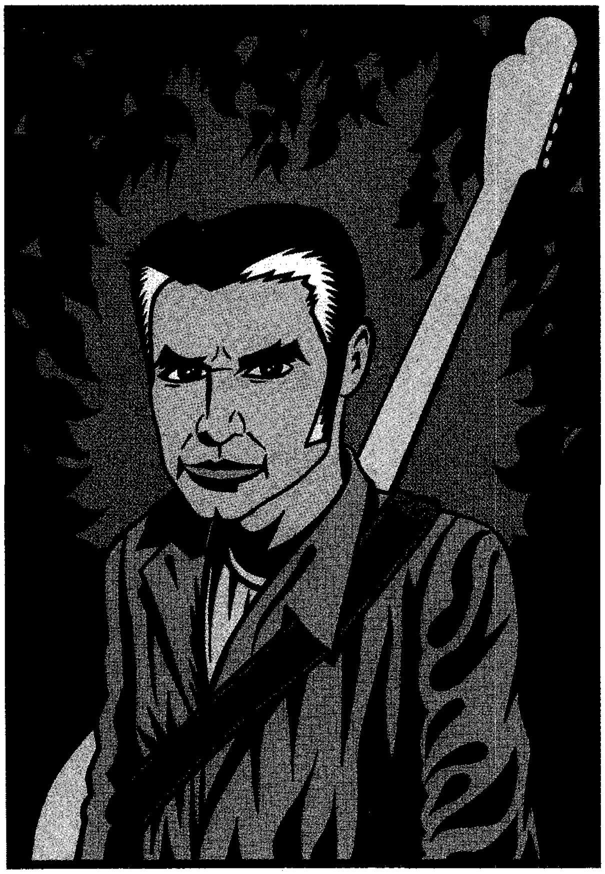
BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Feb. 19-24: The **Clark Terry Big Band.** His auspicious stint with Duke Ellington, as well as his own vibrant, if short-lived, big band of the seventies, has given the playfully virtuosic brassman Terry a taste for massed brass and reeds that continues to grip him well into his eighties.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Feb. 19-24: Tapping into the romantic and frenetic Gypsy-jazz spirit of the legendary Quintet of the Hot Club of France, the violinist **Mark O'Connor** fronts a group with two fast-fingered guitarists, **Frank Vignola** and **Julian Lage,** as well as the vocalist **Jane Monheit.**

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER
Broadway at 60th St. (212-721-6500)—Feb. 22-23: The saxophonist **Paquito D'Rivera** joins **Las Hermanas Marquez** and the guitarist and *sonero* **David Oquendo** and his folk ensemble **Raíces Habanera** for a sweeping exploration of Afro-Cuban jazz.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Feb. 25: **Travis Sullivan's Björkestra.** The songs of Björk have been turning up with increasing frequency within the jazz repertory. The saxophonist Sullivan takes this trend considerably further by reconceiving the Icelandic pop magician's work through a modern big-band context.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Feb. 19-24: The Cuban expat pianist **Gonzalo Rubalcaba.**



The singer-songwriter Jim White pays a visit to Joe's Pub.

THIERRY GUITARD

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Poussin and Nature: Arcadian Visions."** Through May 11. ♦ **"Jasper Johns: Gray."** Through May 4. ♦ **"Eternal Ancestors: The Art of the Central African Reliquary."** Through March 2. ♦ **"Lee Friedlander: A Ramble in Olmsted Parks."** Through May 11. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Lucian Freud: The Painter's Etchings."** Through March 10. ♦ **"Design and the Elastic Mind."** Opens Feb. 24. ♦ **"Jan De Cock: Denkmal 11."** Through April 14. ♦ **"Projects 86: Gert and Uwe Tobias."** Through Feb. 25. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Cai Guo-Qiang: I Want to Believe."** Opens Feb. 22. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—**"Chimneys and Towers: Charles Demuth's Late Paintings of Lancaster."** Opens Feb. 23. ♦ **"Beth Campbell: Following Room."** Through Feb. 24. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Ghada Amer: Love Has No End."** Through Oct. 19. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Water: H_2O=Life."** Through May 26. ♦ Around five hundred specimens flit through the Butterfly Conservatory, a pocket-size hothouse planted with orchids and other rain-forest flora. Through May 26. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—You may be disappointed at first by the diabolically seductive portrait in **"Parmigianino's Antea: A Beautiful Artifice,"** on loan from Naples. Sleek in reproduction, the painting, of a probably imaginary young woman, is rather coarse in person. But give the subject—her dainty chin, bee-stung lips, huge eyes, tapering fingers, perfect flesh, and Mona Lisa-ish air of erotic intelligence—time. The brushy handling of her gorgeous clothes aggrandizes her smoothly painted skin: undressing her, in effect. Everything works to arouse or to warn. Note the congeries of details at the level of her loins: soft gloves, a chain, and the sharp-toothed head of a marten pelt. Through April 27. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St (212-423-3200)—**"From The New Yorker to Shrek: The Art of William Steig."** Through March 16. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"Michelangelo, Vasari, and Their Contemporaries: Drawings from the Uffizi."** Through April 20. ♦ **"Close Encounters: Irving Penn Portraits of Artists and Writers."** Through April 13. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution."** Through May 31. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

SCULPTURECENTER
44-19 Purves St., Long Island City (718-361-1750)—**"Tom Burr: Addict-Love."** The artist has identified the element missing from minimalist sculpture: sex. Burr injects eroticism into abstract forms, made of plywood, mirrored Plexiglas, and other materials. Objects assume louche poses on the concrete floor, their surfaces draped with cast-off clothing—feather boas, trousers, straitjackets—and magazine layouts. The show's title is borrowed from a Frank O'Hara poem; homage is also paid to Kurt Weill and to Chick Austin, the director of Hartford's Wadsworth Atheneum from 1927 to 1944 and a champion of European modernism in America. To understand what Burr has pulled off with this show, imagine how shocked David Smith or Donald Judd might be to see their cool, cerebral geometries sullied with sexual references. Through March 30. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

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GALLERIES—UPTOWN

DAVID SMITH
In the mid-nineteen-fifties, the sculptor David Smith put down his blowtorch and picked up a can of aerosol paint to create the "Sprays" series. The stencilled forms, captured on canvas and paper, look a bit like cameraless photographs, with ghostly shadows and shapes performing a push-pull between positive and negative space. More designlike than other mid-century strains of painting, the "Sprays" won't, most likely, overtake Ab Ex as the signature mode of the day. But, as meditations on light, form, and volume, they are a welcome complement to Smith's monumental sculptures. Through Feb. 23. (Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave. 212-744-2313.)

TABLES FOR TWO
THE SMITH

HONORE BROWN

55 Third Ave., between 10th and 11th Sts. (212-420-9800)—The two-way, four-lane, Jane Jacobs-hostile stretch of Third Avenue just below Fourteenth Street is flanked by the likes of Taco Bell and Pizza Hut, and seems to be a staging ground for a shock-and-awe campaign against the arteries. Last fall, Glenn Harris and Jeffrey Lefcourt turned a former Pizzeria Uno space into the Smith, and, whether intended or not, embraced the drag's blandness. "What's with the name?" a waitress was asked recently. "Well, the owners were thinking Blacksmith or Ironsmith or even Foodsmith," she offered. "But they didn't want to be too specific." Generality appears to be a Harris/Lefcourt trademark—they named their Greenwich Village spot Jane, as in plain—and the new place is nuance-free, all blacks and whites. (White subway tiles and black-and-white photos of Victorian nudes line the walls.) Smith, the owners seem to be reminding us, is Everyman's surname.

So does Everyman eat here? "Oh, we get all kinds," the waitress replied. "All ages, all ethnicities, all genders." A canvass of the room, though, revealed mainly N.Y.U. kids, and the Smith's atmosphere evokes a fraternity house, with the acoustics of a rush-season kegger. Servers toss around collegiate slang ("Riddle me this, Batman," a diner was asked recently. "Can I take that dead soldier in the corner?"), while the menu tends to the sophomoric: one can begin a meal with the Pink Pussy Cat, a specialty cocktail, and end with the Pink Pussy Cat, a strawberry sundae. As in any respectable frat house, the real action occurs in the basement. Here, an antique barber's chair sits next to an old-school photo booth, while the adjoining wall is equipped with a peephole that grants access to vintage porn flicks. All this, plus a flirt-friendly communal washroom.

So the other night two recovering frat guys and a former frat sweetheart were prepared to indulge in a little recidivism. But a bowl of warm potato chips smothered with melted blue cheese and a lipid-infused bacon-and-egg appetizer went barely touched. A pork chop brought to mind a salt lick, and a burger slathered with "special sauce" seemed to pose legitimate issues of copyright infringement (the waitress noted, "We have a Filet-o-Fish on the menu, too"). By evening's end, surplus fries were being woefully played with, and a "big carafe" of red wine remained a quarter full. Grimly, it dawned on the table's senior member that a ten-year college reunion was just around the corner. (Open Mondays through Saturdays for lunch and dinner and Sundays for brunch and dinner. Entrées $11-$23.)

—*Mike Peed*

Short List

JOHN CHAMBERLAIN: PaceWildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 212-421-3292. Through March 15. **DIANA HOROWITZ:** Hirschl & Adler Modern, 21 E. 70th St. 212-535-8810. Through March 15. **JEFF WALL:** Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160. Opens Feb. 23. **CHRIS WARE:** Baumgold, 74 E. 79th St. 212-861-7338. Through March 15. **"HANSEL AND GRETEL":** Gallery Met, Lincoln Center Plaza, at 65th St. 212-870-7441. Through Feb. 29.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

MARK BRADFORD
Bradford's mixed-media collages on canvas suggest nets, webs, and maps of urban centers—the soul of modern life. It's as though the overwhelming cultural cacophony has been tamed, at least somewhat, into a more musical white noise. Aggressively worked surfaces are built up and scraped away until magazine and newspaper pages cede their individual meanings to the abstracted whole, with the occasional fugitive word or image singing out through the hubbub. One piece, built from layers of found posters, is carved to read "James Brown Is Dead." In a side room, another work traces ukiyo-e-esque waves; their serenity and regularity are a cool surprise. Through Feb. 23. (Sikkema Jenkins, 530 W. 22nd St. 212-929-2262.)

JOHN CHIARA
This San Francisco-based photographer's working methods—which involve a portable, homemade, room-size camera obscura big enough for the artist to climb into—are nearly as unusual as his results. Long exposures and their inevitable accidents give Chiara's Bay Area landscapes a fogged, dreamy look. The camera is drunk or drugged and can't quite focus; trees, underbrush, and distant mountains float and heave in overexposed washes of blue, green, or purple light. The largest prints here look like they were transferred straight from a blissed-out eyeball to the astonished wall. Through March 1. (Von Lintel, 555 W. 25th St. 212-242-0599.)

ANNE COLLIER
Collier, one of the few photographers included in the 2006 Whitney Biennial, opts for a modest, almost offhand solo début after star turns in group shows. With only five large-scale color pictures, all in her familiar pop-culture-appropriation mode, the work's restraint, irony, and sly wit have to carry a lot of weight—or effortlessly shrug it off. Collier approaches hot topics gingerly, testing her cool, and ours. She photographs the cover of Tim Buckley's "Happy Sad" album, the poster of a setting sun, and the tarted-up camerawomen on the covers of two foreign photo magazines with the same deadpan detachment, but she still gets under our skin. Through Feb. 23. (Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663.)

RACKSTRAW DOWNES
Two impulses compete in Downes's recent paintings. One is to place the viewer under some large, arching structure like the Henry Hudson Bridge, a stretch of elevated subway, or the scaffolding wrapping the Guggenheim during its restoration. The second is to make classical panoramas of the American West, seen in paintings of the Presidio Horse Racing Association Track in West Texas, where horizontal swathes of sandy, scrub-desert ground meet strips of washed-out sky. Both bodies of work offer perceptual workouts for the viewer, who is tricked into seeing mundane landscapes as spectacular—and vice versa. Through March 1. (Cuningham, 541 W. 25th St. 212-242-2772.)

KAREN KILIMNIK
Dauby, nearly monochrome little paintings of sky or water, as well as some dreamy cloud photographs (one is titled "The Baron von Münchhausen Cloud"—look, you'll see him), renew the spell of Kilimnik's vertiginously sincere, featherlight Romanticism. At the show, a viewer of an all-black tondo was heard to remark, "Oh! I remember that night." How did this eccentric from Philadelphia come by her set of keys to our hearts' secret histories? Usually only musicians affect us so. Kilimnik loads her palette with materialized precipitate of your favorite songs. Through Feb. 23. (303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-255-1121.)

CHRIS MARTIN
"Art is not about delivering some message with speed or a fashionable technology," Martin wrote recently. "The great potential of art is timelessness." This show, marked by formal intelligence and good cheer, demonstrates the sincerity of that statement. Canvases are built up with glitter, yarn, Styrofoam, and cardboard (among other materials), then overlaid with paint in palettes that venture from sixties kitchenette to African textile to bruise. Mary Heilmann comes to mind, as does Yayoi Kusama; another influence is saluted with the chipper title "Good Morning Alfred Jensen Good Morning!" But for all the affinities and allusions in Martin's work, his own hand is always confidently, satisfyingly evident. Through March 1. (Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 534 W. 26th St. 212-744-7400.)

FRANK PAULIN
At eighty-one, Paulin is one of the rare photographers lucky enough to be alive for his "rediscovery"—and the eighty-seven-piece retrospective that propels it. Nearly forty of those photographs were included in a 1957 exhibition at Helen Gee's legendary Limelight gallery, and these vintage prints form a salon-style show within the show. Although he also worked in Chicago and New Orleans, Paulin's prime subject is New York and its street life, from Times Square to the Lower East Side. His style recalls Helen Levitt's lyricism, Leon Levinstein's grit, and Saul Leiter's artful eye for composition while remaining reliably, appealingly idiosyncratic. Through Feb. 23. (Silverstein, 536 W. 24th St. 212-627-3930.)

"EAT THE DOCUMENT"
Curator Dean Daderko borrows the title from Dana Spiotta's recent novel about a former radical living underground, which borrows its title from a 1966 Bob Dylan tour documentary. The works on display rattle the doors of perception and nod toward the hallucinogenic and the countercultural. Alan Shields's circular, dream-machine-style "painting" hanging from the ceiling is an authentic early-seventies artifact, while Eileen Quinlan's abstract, prismatic photographs are updates on psychedelia (and Moholy-Nagy). Jimmy De Sana's fabulous staged photographs from the early eighties are ripe for a revival, while A. K. Burns's cement casts of plastic water bottles look like fossilized Molotov cocktails, relics from an age of insurgency. Through Feb. 23. (Goldston, 530 W. 25th St. 212-206-7887.)

"POETS"
Organized in coöperation with Alice Quinn, the executive director of the Poetry Society of America (and the former poetry editor of this magazine), this small and lovely exhibition showcases visual art by bards. John Ashbery, Star Black, and Joe Brainard make collages—dense, witty, and spooky, with an emphasis on pop and Victorian

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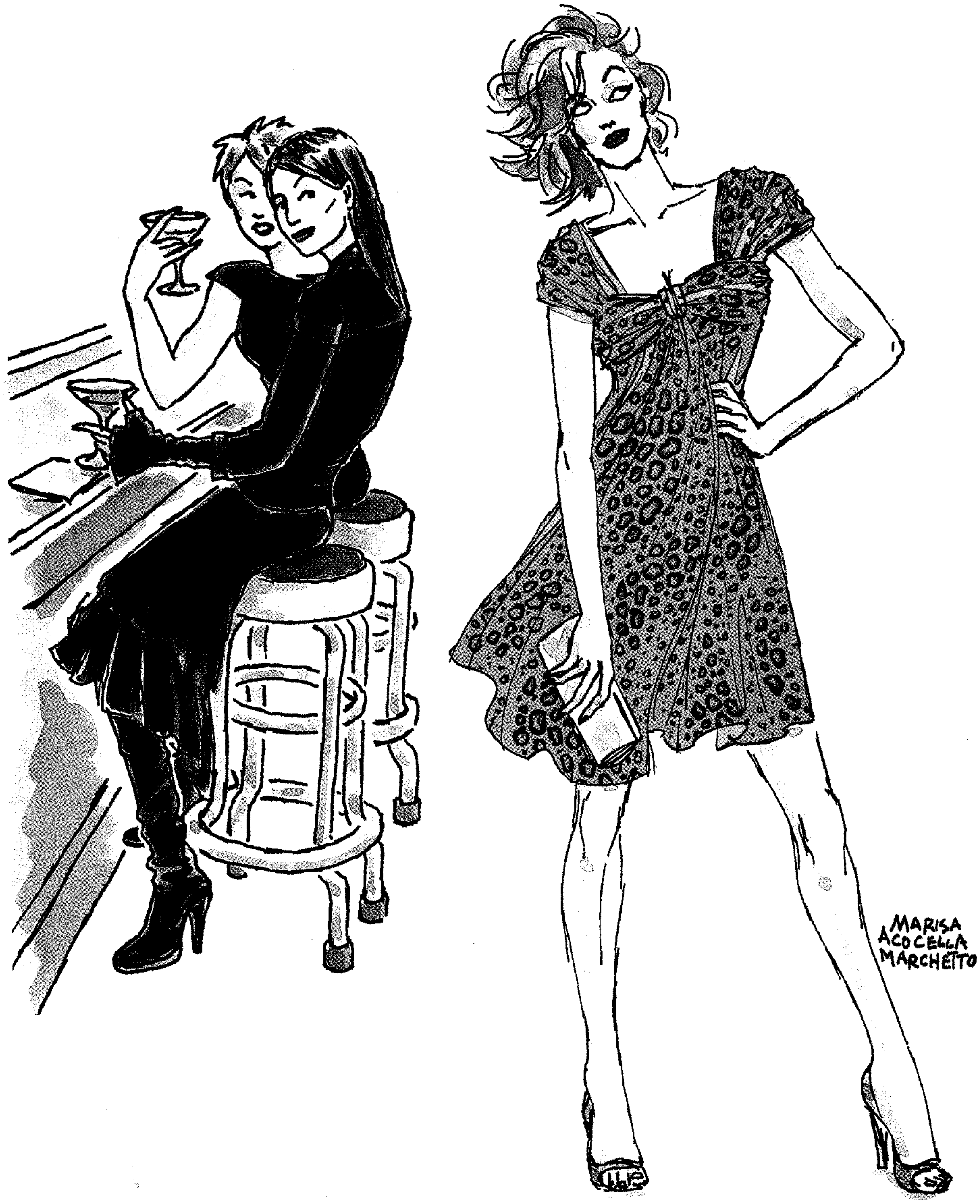
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materials, sexily repurposed. Mark Strand's aquatint etchings are moody and quiet, less humorous than his writing; A. R. Ammons's watercolor is romantic, and Marjorie Welish's diptych paintings are quirkily analytical, like her phrases. Through Feb. 23. (ZieherSmith, 533 W. 25th St. 212-229-1088.)

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
The final week of the company's winter season features two works by Jerome Robbins—the spirited suite of dances from "West Side Story" and "Ives, Songs," an evocation of nostalgic Americana set to songs by Charles Ives. A more pungent sadness suffuses Christopher Wheeldon's re-creation of Oscar Wilde's cruel story "The Nightingale and the Rose," a vehicle for Wendy Whelan's exoticism and reach, performed alongside Balanchine's touching pas de deux "The Steadfast Tin Soldier." On Saturday afternoon, the turbulent new piece by Mauro Bigonzetti, "Oltremare," will be followed by Alexei Ratmansky's whimsical and imaginative "Russian Seasons." Casts are announced on the company's Web site a week in advance. ♦ Feb. 20 at 7:30: "Thou Swell," "Ives, Songs," and "West Side Story Suite." ♦ Feb. 21 and Feb. 23 at 8: "Raymonda Variations," "The Steadfast Tin Soldier," "The Nightingale and the Rose," and "Robert Schumann's 'Davidsbündlertänze.'" ♦ Feb. 22 at 8 and Feb. 24 at 3: "Serenade," "Mozartiana," and "Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No. 2." ♦ Feb. 23 at 2: "An American in Paris," "Valse Triste," "Oltremare," and "Russian Seasons." (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500.)

NRITYAGRAM DANCE ENSEMBLE
The *odissi* classical dance style from Eastern India, presented at the Joyce by this ensemble in the evening-length program "Pratima: Reflection," is entrancing and beautiful, and the Oriya music, played on traditional instruments and sung live onstage, is rhythmically complex and melodically transporting. But it is the dancers—gorgeous, flexible, sensual, lucid—and the amazingly fresh and well-composed choreography, by Surupa Sen, that keep you trembling in your seat. (Joyce, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Feb. 19-20 at 7:30, Feb. 21-23 at 8, and Feb. 24 at 2.)

[ZØGMA]
This self-styled "urban folklore collective" from Quebec—appearing as part of the 92nd Street Y Harkness Dance Festival—takes its name from the Greek term for repeating an idea using different words. This is French-Canadian step dancing, which the troupe seeks to preserve, modernize, and broaden. The loosening of stiff, up-and-down clogging and diddely-diddely rhythms is a little awkward, but ensemble patterns and counterpoint manage to build to a pleasant, if lacklustre, stomp. For "Rapaillé," the words of the Québecois poet Gaston Miron—intoned in translation, sung, and rapped—give all the percussion a wistful inflection. (Ailey Citigroup Theatre, 405 W. 55th St. 212-415-5500. Feb. 20-21 and Feb. 23 at 8 and Feb. 24 at 2.)

"DIANA VISHNEVA: BEAUTY IN MOTION"
Vishneva, a star with both the Kirov and American Ballet Theatre, infuses every role with a turbulent mix of mystery, vulnerability, and daring. In this evening of dances created for her, she will perform a solo by Moses Pendleton (of Momix), a fast-paced ensemble piece by Dwight Rhoden (which also features the dynamic Desmond Richardson), and, most promising of all, a new version of Schoenberg's commedia-dell'arte-inspired song cycle "Pierrot Lunaire," by the Russian choreographer Alexei Ratmansky. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Feb. 21-23 at 8 and Feb. 24 at 3.)

"GENE POOL"
Dance New Amsterdam's dual status as dance studio and presenter finds full expression in this biannual showcase of choreography by its teachers. Each performance offers a different mix of the ten choreographers on tap, including a new solo riff by Monica Bill Barnes on a John F. Kennedy speech, Diane McCarthy's interpretation of Diego Rivera murals, and a funny-cruel excerpt from an upcoming piece by Faye Driscoll. (280 Broadway, at Chambers St. 212-279-4200. Feb. 21-22 at 8 and Feb. 23-24 at 3 and 7.)

"A TALE OF TWO CITIES"
The choreographer and Baroque expert Catherine Turocy presents eighteenth-century dances from the courts of London, Paris, and Versailles, given such thematic titles as "The Diana" (which was created for an ancestor of the People's Princess), "The Prince of Wales" (a saraband), and "The Camilla" (a rigaudon). (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Feb. 21 at 8.)

JULIETTE MAPP
In "Anna, Ikea, and I," in between sections of spare dance (some borrowed from choreographers who have inspired her), Mapp charts her own development in painfully humorous anecdotes. Participants in that process—including Vicky Shick, John Jasperse, Miguel Gutierrez, Levi Gonzalez, and several of Mapp's students—play themselves. Anna Sperber, the Anna of the title, represents Mapp's younger self; the Ikea furniture Mapp bought while living in Jasperse's studio serves as the set. Dense with personal mythology and allusions, the piece is nevertheless warmed by the performers' affection for each other, and for dance. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. Feb. 21-23 at 8:30.)

NEW YORK FLAMENCO FESTIVAL
The flamenco group Son de la Frontera pursues musical innovation by looking backward and sideways, unafraid to investigate neglected corners of tradition, buried roots in India, or analogues in Latin America. Pepe Torres, the troupe's main dancer, is more traditional; young and fiery, he proudly expresses his flamenco lineage. The format is truly collective: guitarists, singer, and dancers all play equal roles. (Skirball Center, 566 LaGuardia Pl. 212-545-7536. Feb. 23 at 8 and Feb. 24 at 7.)

BALLET DE MONTERREY
This contemporary ballet company, based in Mexico's third-largest city, has its Joyce début. The diverse program of Latin-tinged works includes a series of sultry pas de deux set to ballads by Linda Ronstadt ("Perfidia"), a modernist rock-tango work ("Grapatango"), and a piece inspired by religious themes and set to gorgeous music by the Cuban Baroque composer Esteban Salas ("Cantus"). (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Feb. 26 at 7:30. Through March 2.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
The commanding diva Karita Mattila, taking the title role of Puccini's **"Manon Lescaut,"** offers a cool Nordic sound and sensibility that clash with the clichéd verismo realism of the Met's 1980 production, but her many fans will still find much to enjoy. With Marcello Giordani (an unpredictable but authentically Italian Des Grieux), Dwayne Croft, and Dale Travis; Donald Runnicles, who conducted the final performance in Lorin Maazel's run of "Die Walküre," does similar duty here, taking over an orchestra that, under James Levine, played at its magnificent best. (Feb. 20 at 8 and Feb. 23 at 8:30. These are the final performances.) ♦ Bartlett Sher's winsome new staging of **"Il Barbiere di Siviglia"** is a modern Met classic, with sunny colors and a well-measured wit that will insure its continued presence in the repertory. The fine cast includes Elina Garanča (the young Latvian mezzo-soprano, making a charming début as Rosina), Franco Vassallo, José Manuel Zapata, Maurizio Muraro, and the great veteran Ruggero Raimondi (as Don Basilio); Frédéric Chaslin. (Feb. 21 and Feb. 25 at 8.) ♦ Elijah Moshinsky's production of Verdi's (very) grand opera **"Otello"** almost overpowers the Met's stage with its towering scenery, but when the principals are front and center, the action comes alive

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

ALWAYS IN FASHION

Bands like Fall Out Boy are comfortable wearing eyeliner, but who is man enough now to wear blue eyeshadow and a short-waisted jacket that looks like an enormous silver pompom? In 1973, that long-haired man was Brian Eno, then merely the synthesizer player for Roxy Music. A new two-DVD set, "The Thrill of It All," from Virgin Records, captures thirty-six performances, from the band's androgynous start, in 1972, all the way through to 1982, when they released "Avalon," their deathless baby-making album. The band was both decadent and stubborn: virtuoso players who largely restrained themselves from soloing backing up a singer, Bryan Ferry, who refused to accept that he was in a rock band rather than a dinner party. Some of these performances are available online, but Roxy Music needs to be seen in high fidelity. Especially in their youth, the band dressed for work in a way that few bands ever have. As the announcer from BBC's "Old Grey Whistle Test" summed them up: "Anything but denim."

—*Sasha Frere-Jones*

DIVYA SRINIVASAN

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
TEA FOR TWO

In Plato's Symposium, Aristophanes tells how, at the beginning of time, human beings were spherical creatures, rolling around contentedly. Then the gods cut them in two—into males and females, condemned to spend

their lives seeking their other half. India has a similar "myth of the androgyne," but with a happier ending. At the time of creation, the "one" split into two parts, male and female. Every person contains both parts, however, and the two live in harmony, sometimes separating, sometimes uniting ecstatically. The Nrityagram Dance Ensemble, an *odissi* group from South India, performed a thrilling dance on this theme in New York in 2006. The company's upcoming season, which opens at the Joyce on Feb. 19, will feature another version, "Vibhakta," or "The Division." Nrityagram being an all-female troupe, both male and female will be performed by women, the troupe's two finest dancers: Surupa Sen, the artistic director, and Bijayini Satpathy. Like a lot of Indian art, "Vibhakta" is religious and at the same time very sexy.

—*Joan Acocella*

as gripping theatre. Plácido Domingo defined the title role for a generation of Met operagoers, but Johan Botha successfully takes up his mantle with an intensely lyrical and technically secure portrayal; Renée Fleming, as Desdemona, proves that she can still exploit the resources of her uncommonly lovely voice with elegance and taste. The explosive force of Verdi's score registers under the baton of Semyon Bychkov. (Feb. 22 and Feb. 26 at 8.) ♦ Franco Zeffirelli's realist productions are engendering a backlash at the Met, which this bland revival of **"Carmen"** confirms. That said, Olga Borodina, the titular Gypsy, still possesses one of the sexiest voices in opera, and the young tenor Marcelo Álvarez is passionately sincere as her abused (and abusive) lover Don José. With Krassimira Stoyanova and Lucio Gallo; Emmanuel Villaume keeps the drama potent in the pit. (Feb. 23 at 1:30.) ♦ Patricia Racette hosts the Met's annual National Council Auditions Grand Finals Concert, the most prestigious showcase for young singers in America; Stephen Lord conducts the Met Orchestra in a sequence of arias and showpieces. (Feb. 24 at 3.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

DICAPO OPERA: "DANGEROUS LIAISONS"
The hardy professional company, mixing recent works by conservative composers along with repertory classics, presents the New York première of Conrad Susa's 1994 opera, based on the infamous epistolary novel by Choderlos de Laclos. (Dicapo Opera Theatre, 184 E. 76th St. Feb. 21 at 7:30 and Feb. 23 at 8. Through March 2.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

RUSSIAN NATIONAL ORCHESTRA
Vladimir Jurowksi, an impressive young maestro who has just been appointed principal conductor of the London Philharmonic, resists the idea that Russian ensembles should play only Russian music when on tour; his two concerts at Avery Fisher Hall offer an intriguing mix. Feb. 23 at 8: Schubert's "Unfinished" Symphony—finished, that is, in a version by the young composer Anton Safronov—precedes Brahms's Piano Concerto No. 1 (with the elegant Stephen Hough). ♦ Feb. 24 at 3: Brahms's Piano Concerto No. 2 (with the athletic and incisive Garrick Ohlsson) followed by an old favorite, Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6 ("Pathétique"). (212-721-6500.)

MANHATTAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC SYMPHONY
Elliott Carter's "Holiday Overture"—a rambunctious piece from the nineteen-forties—begins a concert conducted by Philippe Entremont that also features Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 3 (with a student soloist, Wael Farouk) and Stravinsky's "Firebird" Suite (in the lean and bracing 1945 version). (Borden Auditorium, Broadway at 122nd St. 917-493-4428. Feb. 24 at 3.)

CHICAGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Pierre Boulez brings one of his favorite orchestras to Carnegie Hall, with French music, new music, and modern classics on the bill. Feb. 25 at 8: The New York première of Matthias Pintscher's "Osiris" is followed by Bartók's Piano Concerto No. 3 (with the insightful Mitsuko Uchida) and Debussy's "Images." ♦ Feb. 26 at 8: The New York Philharmonic is not the only ensemble celebrating the work of Luciano Berio. Boulez's final program, which features Berlioz's "Les Nuits d'Été" (sung by the splendid Susan Graham) and Stravinsky's "Petrushka" (in the 1911 version) begins with "Quatre Dédicaces," a suite of potent miniatures by the eminent Italian composer. (212-247-7800.)

RECITALS

ALFRED BRENDEL
A week notable for its piano programs begins with a major event: the final New York recital of the legendary European pianist, who will perform Haydn's Variations in F Minor, along with sonatas by Mozart, Beethoven ("Quasi una Fantasia," Op. 27, No. 1), and Schubert (in B-Flat Major, D. 960), at Carnegie Hall. (212-247-7800. Feb. 20 at 8.)

CHRISTIAN ZACHARIAS
Another distinguished Germanic pianist, this one in mid-career, offers a recital this week, at the Rose Theatre: an early sonata of Beethoven (Op. 7) and several essays in the form by Scarlatti, introduced by Schumann's dreamy "Kinderszenen." (Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500. Feb. 20 at 8.)

TAKÁCS QUARTET
The formidable Anglo-Hungarian-American foursome's last concert at Zankel Hall was a daring mix of works by Schubert, Glass, and Pärt with readings from Philip Roth's "Everyman"; their next offers the more traditional comforts of string quartets by Haydn, Bartók (No. 5), and Brahms (No. 2 in A Minor). (212-247-7800. Feb. 21 at 7:30.)

MUSIC AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Feb. 21 at 8: Stephen Kovacevich, a notable American pianist long resident in London, offers a concert of music by Bach, Schumann ("Kinderszenen"), and one of his signature pieces, Beethoven's "Diabelli" Variations. ♦ Feb. 22 at 8: The vibrant young players of MMArtists in Concert (led by the cellist Edward Arron) perform quintets by Beethoven, Wuorinen (the Quintet for Piano and Strings), and Dvořák (the String Quintet in E-Flat Major). ♦ Feb. 23 at 8: Elegantly eminent for four decades, the Guarneri String Quartet has announced that it will retire at the end of the 2008-09 season. Their next engagement features quartets by Haydn (the "Rider"), Smetana, and Beethoven (the third "Razumovsky"). (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949.)

KRONOS QUARTET
Four world-première works—by John Adams ("Fellow Traveler"), Aviya Kopelman, Fernando Otero, and Aleksandra Vrebalov—are featured in the latest program from the invaluable adventurers of the string-quartet universe. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. Feb. 22 at 7:30.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER: "AMERICAN VOICES 1750-2008"
In the finale of the society's Winter Festival of American music, the beloved mezzo-soprano Stephanie Blythe joins its musicians in the world première of Alan Louis Smith's "Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman," part of a concert that also includes music by Gottschalk, Heinrich (the "Barbecue Divertimento," from 1825-26), and Ives (the Piano Trio). (New York Society for Ethical Culture, 2 W. 64th St. 212-875-5788. Feb. 22 at 7:30 and Feb. 24 at 5.)

BARGEMUSIC
The violinist Jonathan Gandelsman, from the Silk Road Ensemble, and the dynamic young pianist Francesco Tristano Schlimé offer works by Janáček, Pärt, and Prokofiev (the fiery Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano), along with new music by Luis Prado and Justin Messina. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083. Feb. 22 at 8. For full schedule, see www.bargemusic.org.)

"MUSIC FROM JAPAN" FESTIVAL 2008
Feb. 23 at 8: Decades before Chinese composers came to international attention, Japan's Toru Takemitsu gave classical music a distinctively Asian voice. The first of the annual festival's two concerts is devoted to exploring the concept of *ma* (powerful silence) that Takemitsu held dear, heard in his own work ("Seasons") and in pieces by Cage and Hiroya Miura, all juxtaposed with examples of ancient *gagaku* music (performed by members of the renowned Reigakusha ensemble). ♦ Feb. 24 at 4: "Current Sounds" features new music by such composers as Tetsuji Emura and Toshio Nakagawa ("The Hermit on the Rock"). (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330.)

MIDORI
The violinist, adding some range to her repertory, teams up with some exciting collaborators—including the pianist Marc-André Hamelin, the Daedalus Quartet, and the clarinettist Anthony McGill—to perform two works by the twentieth-century Russian composer Alfred Schnittke (the First Violin Sonata and the Septet) along with pieces by Bach and Shostako-

DANIELA SCHÜTT POZZO

vich (the Piano Quintet). (Rose Theatre, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500. Feb. 24 at 5.)

GILBERT KALISH AND THE JUILLIARD STRING QUARTET

Those looking to slake their thirst for the music of Elliott Carter (not too difficult in New York these days) can hear the Quintet for Piano and Strings (1997) performed by some of the city's most admired artists, who will also take up the Piano Quintet by Ralph Shapey; quartets by Haydn and Verdi round out the program. (Peter Jay Sharp Theatre, Juilliard School. Feb. 25 at 8. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 212-769-7406.)

DAVID FINCKEL AND WU HAN

The husband-and-wife cello-and-piano team, taking a moment off from their stewardship of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, offer a recital of works by Beethoven, Webern, and Brahms (the Cello Sonata No. 2 in F Major) at the Morgan Library and Museum's elegant little concert hall. (Madison Ave. at 36th St. 212-685-0008. Feb. 26 at 7:30.)

MOVIES OPENING

BE KIND REWIND

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Feb. 22. (In wide release.)

CHARLIE BARTLETT

Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Feb. 22. (In wide release.)

THE COUNTERFEITERS

A true-life drama, directed by Stefan Ruzowitzky, about Salomon Sorowitsch, a Jewish man enlisted to run a German counterfeiting operation in a concentration camp. In German. Opening Feb. 22. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

THE DUCHESS OF LANGEAIS

Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Feb. 22. (IFC Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

POSSESSION

A romantic thriller, directed by Joel Bergvall and Simon Sandquist, about a woman who believes that her dead husband's spirit has shifted to his brother. Starring Sarah Michelle Gellar and Lee Pace. Opening Feb. 22. (In wide release.)

THE SIGNAL

A three-part futuristic horror film, directed by David Bruckner, Dan Bush, and Jacob Gentry, in which media broadcasts turn people into killers. Opening Feb. 22. (In wide release.)

VANTAGE POINT

A political thriller about two Secret Service agents (Dennis Quaid and Matthew Fox) on duty when the President (William Hurt) is shot in Spain. Directed by Pete Travis; co-starring Forest Whitaker and Sigourney Weaver. Opening Feb. 22. (In wide release.)

WITLESS PROTECTION

A crime comedy, starring Larry the Cable Guy, directed by Charles Robert Carner. Opening Feb. 22. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

THE BAND'S VISIT

Not a musical comedy but a low-key study of thwarted musicians, touched with comic grace. Written and directed by Eran Kolirin, it tells of an Egyptian police band that gets badly lost on a trip to Israel. The travelling musicians wind up in a desert town, dependent on the mercy and generosity of Dina (Ronit Elkabetz), the owner of a local café, who feeds them and finds them places to sleep. Their entire stay requires a delicate maintenance of dignity on both sides; the peace between old enemies is all the funnier for being so frail. Dina, one of the more forceful female characters in recent cinema, enjoys a melancholy half-flirtation with the band's leader (Sasson Gabai) and a more straightforward dalliance with one of his underlings. The music, when it finally strikes up, has an air of quiet celebration, and rightly so. In Arabic, Hebrew, and halting English.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 2/11 & 18/08.) (In wide release.)

CHARLIE BARTLETT

With teen comedies, as with teen-agers themselves, cleverness goes only so far without heart; if this film has one, it's artificial. The protagonist (Anton Yelchin), a rich kid who's been thrown out of prep school and lands in a suburban public high school, shows up in a blazer and tie and wonders why he doesn't fit in. Shades of "Rushmore," of course—they wish. Charlie ingratiates himself with his classmates by becoming their unofficial psychopharmacologist, and comes into conflict with the hip, beleaguered principal (Robert Downey, Jr.) when he starts to date his savvy daughter (Kat Dennings). The director, Jon Poll, never finds the right tone; the comedy careens from cloying to over-the-top, the breakthroughs and the revelations come with no price, and despite fine, vulnerable performances from Dennings and Downey, the film, with its prefab resolutions, is utterly devoid of life.—*Richard Brody* (In wide release.)

CLOVERFIELD

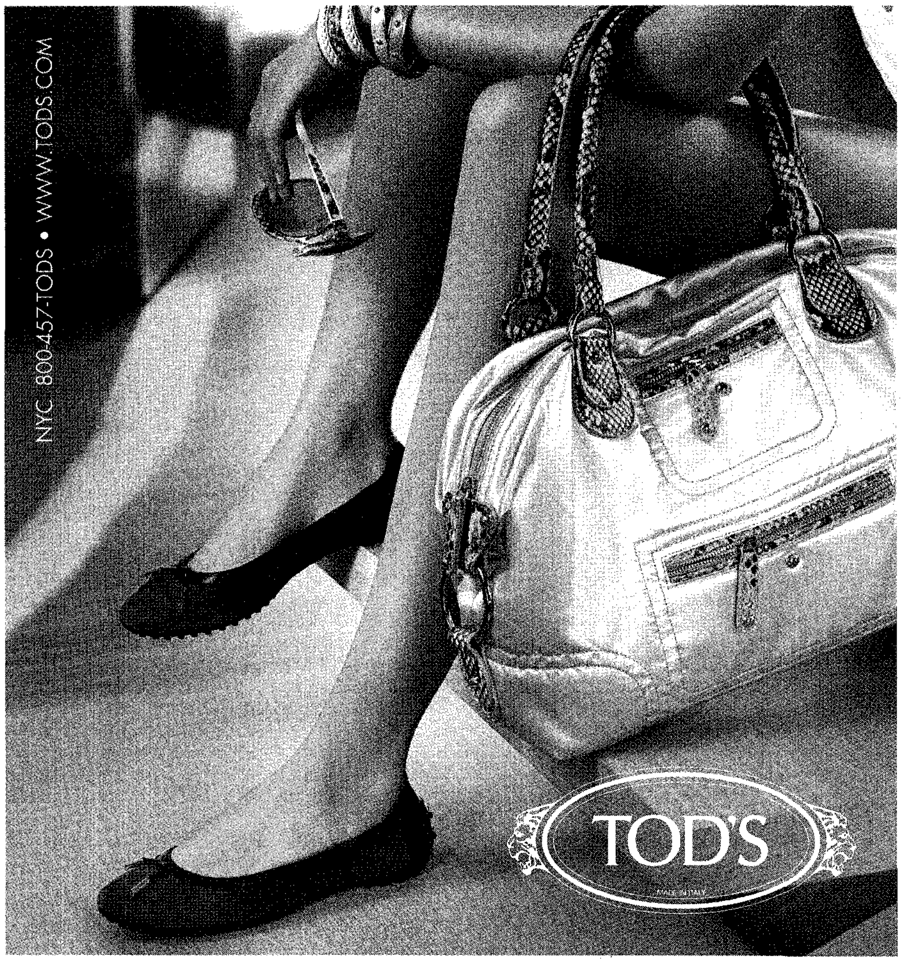
Think "Godzilla" with A.D.D. Matt Reeves's frantic début, co-produced by J. J. Abrams, starts at a social gathering in New York and ends in devastation, thanks to the arrival of a khaki-colored beast the size of Lincoln Center. The movie's big selling point—and, as it happens, the reason it lurches close to the unwatchable—is that we observe the mayhem exclusively through the lens of a camcorder held by Hud (T. J. Miller) as he and three companions (Michael Stahl-David, Jessica Lucas, and Lizzy Caplan) stagger through the city, trying to save a damsel in distress. Given that the rescuers voluntarily walk through subway tunnels in the dark, in open defiance of every monster-movie convention, you can't help feeling that they deserve every giant poisonous spider that comes their way. Blitzed by the chaos, you may not notice just how much the movie cheats: Hud, for instance, appears to be editing as he goes, and his camera possesses magical powers of endurance. The headlong visuals may have a certain novelty and zip, but the rest of the project—the vacant motivation, the dialogue, the weakness for grinding coincidence—is nothing new.—*A.L.* (1/28/08) (In wide release.)

THE DEADLY AFFAIR

An electric poignancy permeates this 1966 adaptation of John le Carré's novella "Call for the Dead." Its prime source is James Mason's performance as a British agent who cracks the mystery of a Foreign Service official's apparent suicide. In the role of le Carré's spy George Smiley, renamed Charles Dobbs for the movie, Mason does a middle-aged variation on the odd men out he played for Carol Reed in the first decade of his stardom. Life keeps letting Dobbs down: his adored wife (Harriet Andersson) has serial affairs, his work has lost its honor. Mason grounds the character's disappointment and concealed strength in his weathered features and brushed-fur voice; everything about him says "bloodied but unbowed." The producer-director, Sidney Lumet, surrounds Mason with a cast of peers, including Simone Signoret as the official's widow and Harry Andrews as the retired inspector who becomes Dobbs's right-hand man. Freddie Young, the cinematographer, gives the film an aptly brooding, almost decolorized look; Paul Dehn wrote the taut script. This is one of Lumet's best movies.—*Michael Sragow* (Film Forum; Feb. 20.)

DEFINITELY, MAYBE

In Adam Brooks's moderately charming romantic comedy, Will (Ryan Reynolds), a young Bill Clinton campaigner turned ad executive, finds himself getting a divorce after nine years of marriage. He tells his daughter, Maya (Abigail Breslin), the story of his past girlfriends—but changes all the names, leaving Maya to guess which one turned out to be her mother, his soon-to-be ex-wife. In flashback, we see Emily (Elizabeth Banks),



the college sweetheart, April (Isla Fisher), the flirtatious friend, and Summer (Rachel Weisz), the man-eating journalist. Some of the jokes are above average, and Fisher and Breslin—and even Reynolds, at times—exude an irresistible warmth, but the film is parsimonious with details, and Brooks ultimately evades the realism that he seems halfway interested in.—*Shauna Lyon* (In wide release.)

THE DUCHESS OF LANGEAIS

The seventy-nine-year-old Jacques Rivette's period piece, adapted from a novel by Balzac, offers few of the graceful adornments of costume drama. Set in the reactionary era of the Restoration, it shudders with the cold, tight grip of absolute power. The movie starts with a wounded retired general, the Marquis de Montriveau, declaring his love to a nun—the duchess of the title—through a latticework of iron bars, and continues as a flashback to the entanglements that led to that grim impasse. The marquis, played by Guillaume Depardieu with a feral energy worthy of his father, meets the duchess (Jeanne Balibar, an intellectual diva) at a high-society soirée and falls hard for her. When she elegantly parries his advances, he threatens violence, sending the story into strange, disturbing dimensions. Rivette strips social relations down to a clash of wills: his scenes compress the romantic fury of paintings by Delacroix or Géricault into drawing-room settings and stage the moral equivalent of war fought sitting down. Though the drama goes off the rails near the end, the overall impression remains harrowing and unforgettable. In French.—*R.B.* (IFC Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Anton Yelchin and Kat Dennings star in "Charlie Bartlett," opening Feb. 22.

MICHAEL WELDON

4 MONTHS, 3 WEEKS AND 2 DAYS

There may be filmgoers who still harbor a footling prejudice against tales of Romanian abortion; in which case, here is the way to trounce them. Cristian Mungiu's forbidding drama, the winner of the Palme d'Or at last year's Cannes Film Festival, is set in Bucharest in 1987. Anamaria Marinca stars as Otilia, a young student trying to help a friend and finding herself thwarted, at every turn, by a jaded and hostile world. Her roommate, the hapless Gabita (Laura Vasiliu), wants to be rid of the baby she is carrying; abortion, however, is illegal, and thus, like almost everything in the city, is subject to the vagaries (and the perils) of the black market. So much about this story could have grown gruesome and sensational; instead, even the central deed—performed by the foul-hearted Mr. Bebe (Vlad Ivanov)—is filmed with unerring control. As for Marinca, she draws us ever nearer with her balance of composure and exasperation; how come the Academy took no notice of this actress? In truth, what Mungiu has made is not an abortion picture; it is a study of a system too exhausted to handle love and death. In Romanian.—*A.L.* (1/28/08) (IFC Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

IN BRUGES

A rare misfire from the Irish playwright Martin McDonagh, whose short film "Six Shooter" won him an Oscar in 2006. His first full-length movie finds a couple of Irish assassins, Ken (Brendan Gleeson) and Ray (Colin Farrell), hiding out in Bruges, Belgium: hardly an obvious refuge for murderers, although McDonagh could have done more with the sinister peace in which even the prettiest canal city can be enfolded. There is something to savor in the early scenes, as the jovial, cultivated Ken squares off against his more impatient sidekick, and their backchat hits an appealing rhythm. Halfway through, however, the film subsides into a mess, exchanging patter for the less amusing spectacle of bullet wounds and bursting heads. If McDonagh wanted to prove himself more than a wordsmith, this was not the way to go about it. With Ralph Fiennes as the men's employer, the most foulmouthed of the three.—*A.L.* (2/11 & 18/08) (In wide release.)

I NO LONGER HEAR THE GUITAR

This quiet, stark love story, from 1991, is Philippe Garrel's most radical attempt at confessional melodrama. The simple setup—two bohemian couples in a beach house, talking about love—quickly crystallizes around one pair, the romantic dialectician Gérard (Benoît Régent) and a troubled woman, Marianne (Johanna ter Steege), and their bitter breakup. When they get back together, it's a match made with heroin and other artificial pleasures. After their inevitable degradation, Gérard manages to remake his life, into which Marianne once again intrudes. Holding tight to his characters with long takes and closeups, capturing them only at the breaking points in their lives, Garrel balances a hypnotic romanticism with the frightening lurch of unsteady emotions. Leaping effortlessly, audaciously ahead in time, the fractured form embodies Garrel's themes: the speed of life passing, the inescapable burden of memory. He dedicates the film to the singer Nico, with whom he lived in the seventies, and who died in 1988. In French.—*R.B.* (Walter Reade; Feb. 25.)

JUMPER

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

THE ORPHANAGE

A skillful and destabilizing début from the young Spanish director Juan Antonio Bayona, in collaboration with the screenwriter Sergio G. Sánchez and the producer Guillermo del Toro (whose own films, notably "The Devil's Backbone," are a looming influence here). A happy couple, Laura (Belén Rueda) and Carlos (Fernando Cayo), buy the old orphanage where Laura herself was raised, and plan to reopen it as a home for disabled children. They have a son of their own, who appears to befriend the long-gone inhabitants of the place, as if communing with ghosts. When he disappears, a professional medium (Geraldine Chaplin) is brought in to help with the search; the staging of her séance, under green night-vision light, is designed to stretch and snap the nerves of the hardiest viewer. The movie, however, is more than the sum of its shocks, ripening into a detailed study of childhood anxiety and the extremes of maternal love. In Spanish.—*A.L.* (1/14/08) (In wide release.)

STILL LIFE

A metaphysical ghost-town movie from the Chinese film poet Jia Zhang-ke. The enormous Three Gorges hydroelectric project, damming the Yangtze River, has flooded some of the towns and cities upstream, including Fengjie, where abandoned buildings rot in the summer heat; the only people remaining are the elderly and groups of workmen slowly demolishing the remaining structures with hand tools. The movie chronicles the adventures of two outsiders looking for their mates, who have been working on the project, but the story is intermittent at best. Instead, the movie is a flawless realization of limbo, in which the past has died and the future has yet to arrive. Despite the desolation, it's a beautiful-looking piece of work. From the high banks, the river and the green mountains on both sides of it extend into the distance in majestic panoply; gray clouds hang over the scene like painted backdrops. Jia, working with the cinematographer Yu Wiklai, is incapable of making an ugly or unresonant image: the air seems moist and palpable, and even the thick, rusted pipes of derelict factories appear to breathe. In Mandarin.—*David Denby* (1/21/08) (IFC Center.)

SUMMER PALACE

Fourteen years (from 1987 to 2001) in the life of Yu Hong (Hao Lei), a soulful girl who leaves the provinces, goes to university in Beijing, and carries on a passionate affair with a handsome student, Zhou Wei (Guo Xiaodong), and many other men. The director, Lou Ye, uses jump cuts and a handheld camera, which, combined with Yu Hong's solemnly lyrical narration, make "Summer Palace" feel, at times, like a French New Wave film from 1967, but with much more explicit and frequent sex. The revelation, and great triumph, of Lou's work is that the scenes are not the least bit pornographic—that is, they're never separated from the most passionate emotion. Yu Hong and her friends change partners, but then the student idyll runs into the massacre at Tiananmen Square, in 1989, which Lou stages at the outskirts, as a furious confusion of rushing bodies. In the aftermath, the characters scatter to other cities in China, or go into exile in Berlin, where the love affairs lose their power—they become the last flings of a defeated generation. Needless to say, Lou has been banned from working in China, for five years. In Mandarin and German.—*D.D.* (1/21/08) (Cinema Village.)

U2 3D

One of the world's greatest rock bands gets the full 3-D treatment in this fantastic concert film, directed by Catherine Owens and Mark Pellington. Filmed over the course of a week's worth of performances in Buenos Aires during the band's 2006 "Vertigo" tour, the movie features more than a dozen tunes, performed to perfection and infused with the overt, loving excitement of a band that lives for musical transcendence. Owens and Pellington's use of multiple cameras, particularly those placed among the adoring crowds, brings a joyous human element to the show, and the concert has been distilled to a heady eighty-five minutes that showcases some of the greatest work the band has ever done. It may be the best concert film since "Stop Making Sense."—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

THE WITNESSES

The veteran French director André Téchiné has tried to capture the uneasy moment in Paris when the AIDS virus first hit the city. The year is 1984, and Manu (Johan Libéreau), who's from the South of France, and of North African descent, is a carefree young man living at the center of a sophisticated group of friends—a middle-aged gay doctor, Adrien (Michel Blanc), who makes Manu his protégé without demanding anything from him sexually; the doctor's friend, Sarah (Emmanuelle Béart), a rather narcissistic writer of children's books who is looking for a subject for grownup fiction and finally finds one in the young man's life; her husband, Mehdi (Sami Bouajila), a detective on the Paris vice squad who becomes Manu's lover; and Manu's older sister, Julie (Julie Depardieu), an opera performer whose way with Mozart suggests a depth of feeling that the others don't have. The film is highly intelligent, but, despite some furious scenes of temper and bitterness, it has a largely placid bourgeois surface. The older characters all announce their feelings and their opinions of one another in perfectly formed, rapidly delivered sentences. They summarize their emotions rather than living them. Unconsciously, perhaps, Téchiné has produced a portrait of people who are determined to show that, whatever disaster may strike, nothing really gets to them. In French.—*D.D.* (2/4/08) (IFC Center.)

Also Playing

ATONEMENT: In wide release (12/10/07). **JUNO:** In wide release (12/17/07). **MICHAEL CLAYTON:** In wide release (10/8/07). **NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN:** In wide release (11/12/07). **THERE WILL BE BLOOD:** In wide release (12/17/07).

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—The Films of Lin Cheng-Sheng. Feb. 20 at 7: "A Drifting Life" (1996; in Mandarin). ♦ Feb. 20 at 9:30: "Murmur of Youth" (1997; in Mandarin). ♦ Feb. 21 at 7: "Robinson's Crusoe" (2002; in Mandarin). ♦ Feb. 21 at 9: "The Moon Also Rises" (2005; in Hokkien, Mandarin, and Japanese). ♦ "NewFilmmakers Presents." Feb. 20 at 9:10: "On Calloway Street" (2007, Ramon Rivera-Moret). ♦ In première. Feb. 22 at 7 and Feb. 23-24 at 3 and 7: "State Legislature" (2007, Frederick Wiseman).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—In revival. Feb. 20 at 4:30 and 9:40 and Feb. 21 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Loves of a Blonde" (1965, Milos Forman; in Czech). ♦ In preview. Feb. 20 at 6:40: "Black Magic" (2008, Dan Klores), followed by a discussion with the director. ♦ "The National Selects." Feb. 22 at 3:30, 6:30, and 9:30: "Broadcast News" (1987, James L. Brooks). ♦ "The Best of the African Diaspora Film Festival." Feb. 23 at 2: "Cuba, an African Odyssey" (2007, Jihan el Tahri; in French, English, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish). ♦ Feb. 23 and Feb. 25 at 4:30: "No Time to Die" (2006, King Ampaw). ♦ Feb. 23 and Feb. 25 at 6:50: "A Winter Tale" (2007, Frances-Anne Solomon). ♦ Feb. 23 and Feb. 26 at 9:30: "Made in Jamaica" (2006, Jerome Laperrousaz). ♦ Feb. 24 at 2: "Iron Ladies of Liberia" (2007, Slatta Scott Johnson and Daniel Junge; in French). ♦ Feb. 24 at 4:30: "The President Has AIDS?" (2006, Arnold Antonin; in Creole and French). ♦ Feb. 24 at 6:50: "Josephine Baker: Black Diva in a White Man's World" (2006, Annette von Wangenheim; in English, French, and German) and "Black as Ink" (1997, Jacques Goldstein and Blaise N'Djehoya; in English and French). ♦ Feb. 24 at 9:15 and Feb. 26 at 6:50: "Youssou N'Dour: Return to Gorée" (2006, Pierre-Yves Borgeaud; in French and English).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Through Feb. 28: The films of Sidney Lumet. ♦ Feb. 20 at 1:30, 5:30, and 9:30: "The Deadly Affair" (†). ♦ Feb. 20 at 3:40 and 7:40: "The Anderson Tapes" (1971). ♦ Feb. 21 at 1, 3:40, 6:20, and 9: "The Sea Gull" (1968). ♦ Feb. 22-23 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Serpico" (1973). ♦ Feb. 24 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Dog Day Afternoon" (1975). ♦ Feb. 25 at 3:30 and 7: "Bye Bye Braveman" (1968). ♦ Feb. 25 at 1:55 and 5:20: "One Third of a Nation" (1939, Dudley Murphy). ♦ Feb. 25 at 8:50: "Night Falls on Manhattan" (1997). ♦ Feb. 26 at 3:05 and 7:30: "The Fugitive Kind" (1959). ♦ Feb. 26 at 1, 5:20, and 9:45: "A View from the Bridge" (1962; in French and English).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—"Rare Treasures of French Cinema." Feb. 26 at 12:30, 4, and 7:30: "Mouchette" (1967, Robert Bresson; in French).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—The films of Louis Malle. Feb. 22-24 at 11 A.M.: "Humain, Trop Humain" (1974; in French). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Feb. 22-23: "Risky Business" (1983, Paul Brickman). ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction," a documentary series. Feb. 26 at 8: "For All Mankind" (1990, Al Reinert), introduced by the director.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Still Moving." Feb. 20-22 at 1:30: "A Slight Case of Murder" (1938, Lloyd Bacon). ♦ The films of Milos Forman. Feb. 20 at 6: "Taking Off" (1971). ♦ Feb. 20 at 8 and Feb. 24 at 4: "The People vs. Larry Flynt" (1996). ♦ Feb. 21 at 5:30 and Feb. 23 at 7: "I Miss Sonia Henie" (1971) and "Chytilová vs. Forman" (1981, Vera Chytilová). ♦ Feb. 21 at 8: "Ragtime" (1981). ♦ Feb. 22 at 6: "Man on the Moon" (1999). ♦ Feb. 22 at 8:30: "Valmont" (1989). ♦ Feb. 23 at 2: "Black Peter" (1964). ♦ Feb. 23 at 4: "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" (1975). ♦ Feb. 24 at 1:30: "Hair" (1979). ♦ Feb. 24 at 6:30: "A Well-Paid Walk/A Walk Worthwhile" (1966; in Czech). ♦ Feb. 25 at 6: "Loves of a Blonde" (1965; in Czech). ♦ Feb. 25 at 8: "The Firemen's Ball" (1967; in Czech). ♦ "Documentary Fortnight, 2008." Feb. 21 at 6: "Mechkar: The Story of a Bulgarian Bear Owner" (2006, Albin Biblom; in Swedish and Bulgarian) and "Balkan Rhapsodies: Encounters, Observations and Afterthoughts About Serbia and Kosovo" (2007, Jeff Silva). ♦ Feb. 21 at 8:30: "Tovarich: I Am Not Dead" (2007, Stuart Urban). ♦ The films of Joan Churchill. Feb. 22 at 8:15: "Juvenile Liaison" (1975). ♦ Feb. 23 at 2: "Punishment Park" (1971, Peter Watkins). ♦ Feb. 23 at 4: "Soldier Girls" (1981, Churchill and Nick Broomfield). ♦ Feb. 23 at 6: "Aileen: Life and Death of a Serial Killer" (2003, Churchill and Broomfield).

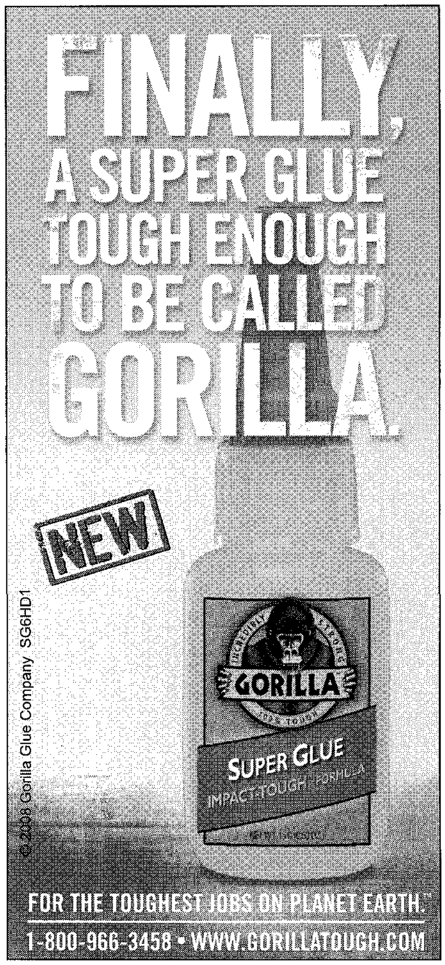
MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Films directed by John Ford at Twentieth Century Fox. Feb. 23 at 2 and Feb. 24 at 6:30: "How Green Was My Valley" (1931). ♦ Feb. 23 at 4:30: "The World Moves On" (1934). ♦ Feb. 24 at 2: "December 7th" (1943), "The Battle of Midway" (1942), and "Torpedo Squadron" (1942). ♦ Feb. 24 at 3:30: "What Price Glory" (1952). ♦ Preview screening. Feb. 23 at 6:30: "The Axe in the Attic" (2007). ♦ In preview. Feb. 26 at 7: "Diary of the Dead" (2007, Ed Pincus and Lucia Small), followed by a discussion with Small.

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000, ext. 344)—"Cabaret Cinema." Feb. 22 at 9:30: "Slaughterhouse-Five" (1972, George Roy Hill), introduced by David Velleman.

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@Midnight." Feb. 22-23: "Blazing Saddles" (1974, Mel Brooks).

THALIA THEATRE
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—"Best Films of 1978." Feb. 24 at 7:30: "Autumn Sonata" (1978, Ingmar Bergman; in Swedish and English). ♦ Feb. 26 at 7:30: "Interiors" (1978, Woody Allen).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—"*Film Comment* Selects." Feb. 20 at 1: "Wolfsbergen" (2007, Nanouk Leopold). ♦ Feb. 20 at 3 and Feb. 25 at 2: "The Banishment" (2007, Andrei Zvyagintsev; in Russian). ♦ Feb. 20 at 6:15: "Dust" (2007, Hartmut Bitomsky). ♦ Feb. 20 at 8:15: "Import Export" (2007, Ulrich Seidl). ♦ Feb. 21 at 3:15: "Before I Forget" (2007, Jacques Nolot; in French). ♦ Feb. 22 at 1:30: "A Wonderful World" (2007, Luis Estrada). ♦ Feb. 22 at 4: "Flash Point" (2007, Wilson Yip). ♦ Feb. 22 at 6:15: "Reflections of Evil" (2002, Damon Packard). ♦ Feb. 22 at 9: "Frontière(s)" (2007, Xavier Gens). ♦ Feb.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23 at 4:30: "The Edge of Heaven" (2007, Fatih Akin; in Turkish and German). ♦ Feb. 23 at 7: "Rubin and Ed" (1992, Trent Harris). ♦ Feb. 24 at 3:45: "Schindler's Houses" (2007, Heinz Emigholz). ♦ Feb. 24 at 6: "Damon Packard's Greatest Hits" (1992-2005, Packard). ♦ Feb. 24 at 9 and Feb. 26 at 4: "Inside" (2007, Julien Maury and Alexandre Bustillo). ♦ Feb. 26 at 2:15 and 9:15: "Container" (2006, Lukas Moodysson). ♦ Special screenings. Feb. 21 at 1 and Feb. 24 at 1:30: "10 Rillington Place" (1971, Richard Fleischer). ♦ Feb. 23 at 2: "Mandingo" (1975, Fleischer). ♦ Feb. 25 at 8:30: "I No Longer Hear the Guitar" (†). ♦ Feb. 26 at 6:30: "Flow: For Love of Water" (2008, Irena Salina).

READINGS AND TALKS

NATIONAL ARTS CLUB
Felicia C. Sullivan reads from her memoir, "The Sky Isn't Visible from Here: Scenes from a Life." With David M. Friedman, who will read from his book "The Immortalists: Charles Lindbergh, Dr. Alexis Carrel, and Their Daring Quest to Live Forever," and Craig Morgan Teicher, who will read from his book, "Brenda Is in the Room and Other Poems." (15 Gramercy Park S. No tickets necessary. Feb. 20 at 7.)

THE POETRY PROJECT
Alison Knowles and Jerome Rothenberg read from their work. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. Tickets at the door. Feb. 20 at 8.)

TRIBUTE TO ALICE QUINN
The poets Henri Cole, Deborah Garrison, Jessica Greenbaum, Eamon Grennan, Major Jackson, Yusef Komunyakaa, Sharon Olds, Vijay Seshadri, Jean Valentine, C. K. Williams, and Matthew Zapruder honor the former poetry editor of this magazine, who stepped down last year after two decades at the helm. (New School, 55 W. 13th St. No tickets necessary. Feb. 21 at 7.)

K.G.B.
A night of nonfiction, with Janice Erlbaum, John Marks, and Neal Pollack. (85 E. 4th St. No tickets necessary. Feb. 26 at 7.)

TRIBUTE TO CHINUA ACHEBE
Toni Morrison, Michael Cunningham, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Edwidge Danticat, Chris Abani, Suheir Hammad, Ha Jin, Colum McCann, and others join Achebe in celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of his novel "Things Fall Apart." (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 212-307-4100. Feb. 26 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

GREENWICH VILLAGE ANTIQUARIAN BOOK FAIR
Some seventy dealers from across the country display their first editions, maps, prints, and paper ephemera, in a sale to benefit the students at P.S. 3. (490 Hudson St., between Christopher and Grove Sts. Feb. 22 from 6 to 9, Feb. 23 from noon to 5, and Feb. 25 from noon to 4. For more information, visit www.gvabf.org.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
This quiet stretch in the world of conspicuous art consumption has nothing to do with the flagging economy but rather with the vagaries of auction-house scheduling. **Christie's** presents a single sale this week, a selection of photographs (Feb. 20) that includes a particularly relevant image: of a joyfully radiant Hillary Clinton, not yet the battle-hardened veteran, at a women's-health conference in 1993. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ **Sotheby's** first wine auction of the year, held in conjunction with the wine retailer Aulden Cellars (Feb. 25), is devoted to the collection of an anonymous New York wine aficionado with a penchant for Bordeaux and California wine, and, to a lesser extent, vintages from the Rhône Valley, Italy, and Australia. A three-course dinner will be served—B.Y.O.W.—as bottles of 1982 Lafleur, 1982 and 1986 Mouton Rothschild, and 1989 Haut-Brion go to the highest bidder. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ At **Swann** on Feb. 21, there will be a second sale of African-Americana (after the fine-art auction on Feb. 19), focussing on prints, books, and manuscripts, such as the visiting card of the famous "Two-Headed Nightingale," the performing conjoined twins Millie and Christine McCoy; an inscribed first edition of W. E. B. Du Bois's "The Souls of Black Folk"; and a group of letters to and from Western Moore, a black farmer from Mercer County, Ohio, who fought in the Civil War. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.) ♦ The **Art Show,** one of the city's enduring independent art fairs (now twenty years old), brings together seventy dealers from across the country at the 7th Regiment Armory, offering a panoply of fine art works from the nineteenth century to the present. (Park Ave. at 67th St. Feb. 21-25. www.artdealers.org.)

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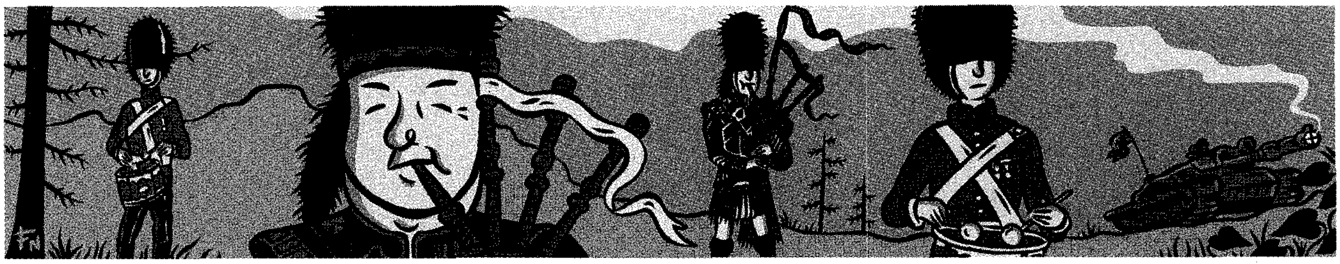
Visit the Goings On blog at www.newyorker.com/go/goingson for additional cultural coverage and commentary.



FIDO NESTI

The Pipes, Drums, and Dancers of the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards, at the Met.

ON THE HORIZON

DANCE
GEORGIA PEACH
Feb. 27–March 2

In 2004, the Bolshoi Ballet and American Ballet Theatre star Nina Ananiashvili returned to her turbulent native country of Georgia to shake up the national troupe. New York audiences will get a glimpse of her transformative powers next week, when the State Ballet of Georgia has its first New York engagement, at BAM, where it will perform works by Balanchine, Alexei Ratmansky, and Yuri Possokhov. (718-636-4100.)

ART
HUE TURN
March 2–May 12

MOMA's upcoming show "Color Chart: Reinventing Color, 1950 to Today" identifies a broad shift in artists' approaches to their palettes, away from the spiritual (á la Kandinsky) and theoretical (Josef Albers), and toward ready-made sources and random systems. On view will be nearly a hundred works by dozens of artists, including Bas Jan Ader, Daniel Buren, Damien Hirst, Yves Klein, Sherrie Levine, Gerhard Richter, Frank Stella, and Andy Warhol. (212-708-9400.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND
WAR GAMES
March 5

The Metropolitan Museum's Temple of Dendur will be host to "A Royal Celebration," in which the Pipes, Drums, and Dancers of the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards and the Band of the Coldstream Guards perform music of England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. (212-570-3949.)

MOVIES
TRIPLE DIGITS
March 7–30

Not only does the Portuguese director Manoel de Oliveira celebrate his centennial in 2008 but he is still making films, and indeed working at the peak of his artistry, as seen in such recent wonders as last year's "Belle Toujours." BAM offers a retrospective of his work that stretches back to "Working on the River Douro," a silent film from 1931, and includes such recent masterworks as "I'm Going Home," which was released in 2001, when the director was a spry ninety-three, and which stars Michel Piccoli and John Malkovich. (718-636-4100.)

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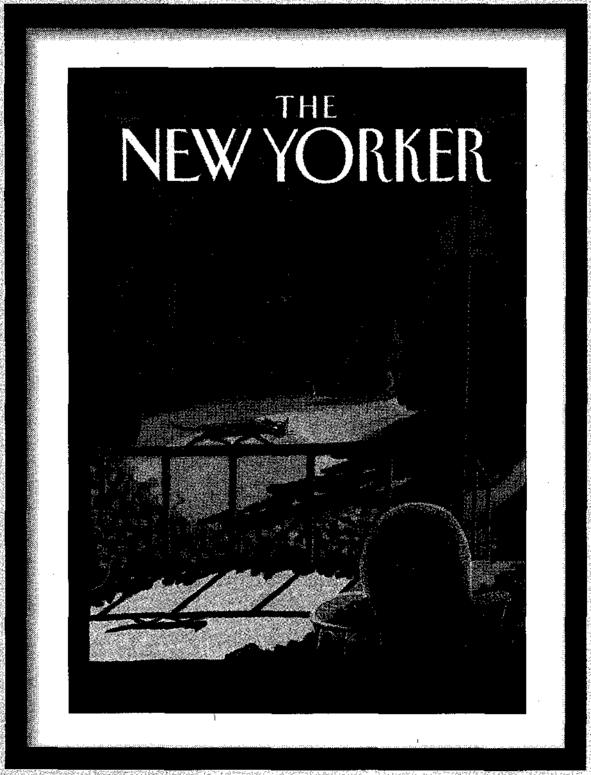

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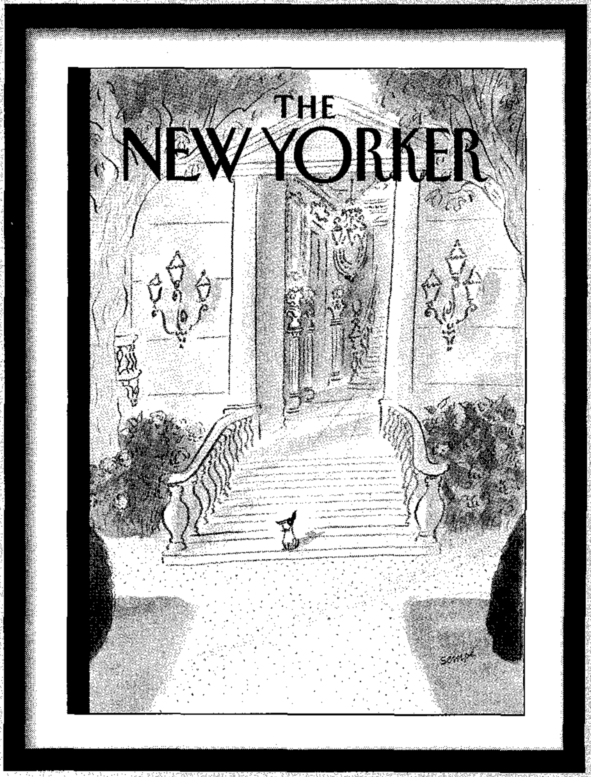

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THE
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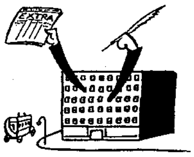
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
HIGHER STANDARDS



A few days before Senator Barack Obama swept the Democratic primaries in Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia, people across the country, picking up their favorite newspaper, were greeted with the following headline:

> OLD FRIENDS SAY DRUGS PLAYED
> BIG PART IN OBAMA'S YOUNG LIFE

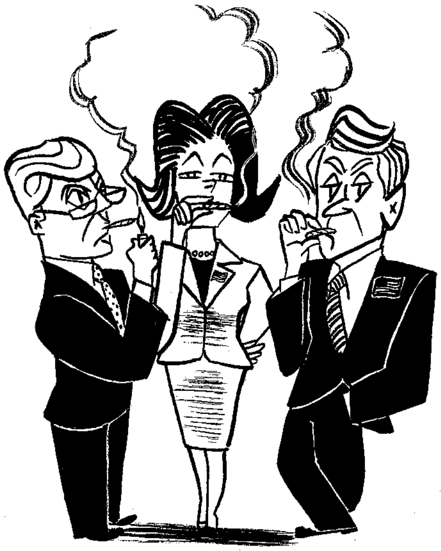
In any event, that's what some readers thought they read. On second glance, they realized their mistake. The headline actually said this:

> OLD FRIENDS SAY DRUGS PLAYED
> BIT PART IN OBAMA'S YOUNG LIFE

Maybe, though, the mistake wasn't just the readers', especially the bleary-eyed among them who hadn't yet had their morning coffee. After all, it wasn't exactly news that "drugs" had played a part (and only a "bit part" at that) in the adolescence of the junior senator from Illinois. That particular factoid had been on the public record for more than twelve years. And if it wasn't news, what was it doing on the front page of the New York *Times*?

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

The big news, or bit news, about Obama and drugs had been broken by the future Presidential candidate himself, in "Dreams from My Father," published in 1995, when he was thirty-three years old. In "Dreams," Obama treats his teen-age chemical indulgences the way he treats pretty much everything else in his coming-of-age story: subtly, with impressive emotional acuity, against a richly drawn personal, cultural, and social background. Ripped from their context like the heart of an Aztec sacrifice, the facts Obama presents are these: He smoked pot during his last couple of years of high school, in Hawaii, and his first couple of years of college, at Occidental, in California. Once in a while, he treated himself to "a little blow." After his sophomore year, he transferred east, to Columbia, where he took up running (three miles a day), stopped hanging out in bars, and started keeping a journal. Also, he writes, "I quit getting high." That's about all. Substance, apparently, became more interesting to him than substance abuse.



But it's not as if the *Times*' nearly two thousand words had nothing to add to this. "Mr. Obama's account of his younger self and drugs, though, significantly differs from the recollections of others," the paper's story teases, as if promising scandal. Is a Perry Mason moment at hand? Not really:

> In more than three dozen interviews, friends, classmates and mentors from his high school and Occidental recalled Mr. Obama as being grounded, motivated and poised, someone who did not appear to be grappling with any drug problems and seemed to dabble only with marijuana.

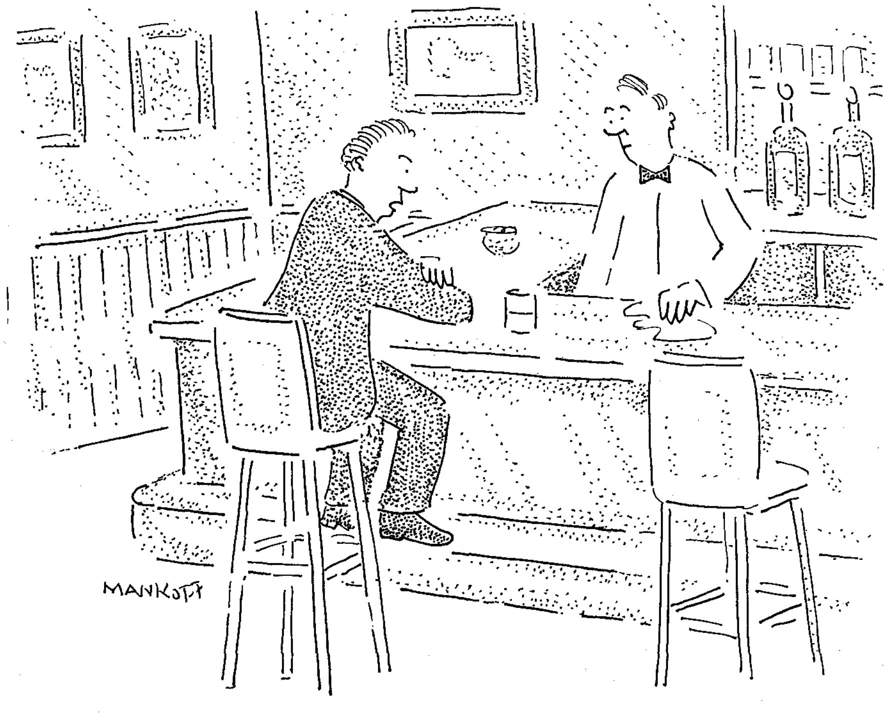
The news here is—what, exactly? That Obama, who now appears grounded, motivated, and poised, formerly appeared grounded, motivated, and poised? That his inner uncertainties, such as they were, were more apparent to himself than to others? That he was marginally *less* of a pothead than he has made himself out to be?

If this last was the point, it at least shows that times have—to use the past participle of Obama's favorite word—changed. For a candidate to stand accused of exaggerating his youthful drug use is something new indeed. Yet the overall cultural trend is unmistakable. In

1987, Douglas H. Ginsburg's disclosure that (as the *Times* reported) "he had smoked marijuana a number of times after becoming a professor at the Harvard Law School" sank his Supreme Court nomination faster than you could just say no. In 1992, making an early foray into verbal hairsplitting, Bill Clinton said he had "never broken a state law," meaning that England was where he hadn't inhaled. By 2000, we were well into the age of the "experimented with marijuana" dodge, with getting zonked spun as a science project. But in 2004 the three leading Democratic hopefuls—John Kerry, Howard Dean, and John Edwards—all acknowledged without quibbling that they'd smoked pot.

As for the two other senators who currently stand a chance of being elected President, Hillary Clinton and John McCain have issued denials, though McCain seemed downright apologetic about it. Asked the question in 2000, he pointed out that he was in a North Vietnamese prison camp by the time pot became the Navy's weed of choice when the smoking lamp was lit. "Also," he added sheepishly, "remember my age: sixty-three." And the current occupier of the Oval Office? Well, George W. Bush announced in 1999 that he had been drug free since 1974.

None of this ought to matter, of course. Voters, rightly, don't much seem to care. But there is a glaring discontinuity between the lived experience of Americans and the drug policies of their governments. Nearly a hundred million of us—forty per cent of the adult population, including pillars of the nation's political, financial, academic, and media élites—have smoked (and, therefore, possessed) marijuana at some point, thereby committing an offense that, with a bit of bad luck, could have resulted in humiliation, the loss of benefits such as college loans and scholarships, or worse. More than forty thousand people are in jail for marijuana offenses, and some seven hundred thousand are arrested annually merely for possession. Meanwhile, the percentage of high-school seniors who have used pot has remained steady, between forty and fifty per cent. Nor have the prices of illicit drugs—which would rise sharply if the drug war were having any success—changed appreciably. Indeed, according to the government's "National Drug Threat Assessment" for 2008, increases in domestic pot production, combined with the continued flow from abroad, point to a future of "market saturation," which "could reduce the price of the drug significantly." Meanwhile, potency has "reached its highest recorded level."



"I lost all my Facebook friends after I asked them to lend me some money."

Of all our country's ongoing wars—poverty, cancer, Iraq, Afghanistan—none is a more comprehensive disaster than the war on drugs. Unlike McCain, Obama and Clinton have at least promised to stop the feds from harassing medical marijuana patients and dispensaries in the dozen states whose laws permit marijuana to be used for medical purposes. But neither has given any indication of a willingness to rescue us from the larger disgrace of the drug war—the billions wasted, the millions harmed, the utter futility of it. On this point, hesitancy trumps hope, and expedience trumps experience.

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

WIND ON CAPITOL HILL

JUICE

The last time Major League Baseball players appeared before Congress, three years ago, a Talk of the Town reporter sitting in the back of the room vowed never to return. The customary congressional self-seriousness, combined with an embarrassing amount of hero worship and token moralizing, was enough to inspire fantasies of another government shutdown. The issue, of course, was steroids, and in the interim, thanks to former Senator George Mitchell's three-hundred-page report, names have been named. Last week brought Roger Clemens before the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform to face his accuser and former trainer, Brian McNamee, in a game of perjurers' chicken that seemed to promise judicial action rather than mere reprimand. And, since saying one thing and then doing another is at the root of the issue, please forgive the lapse in journalistic accountability: a repeat visit.

Clemens's appearance—a "Roman circus," according to Christopher Shays (R., Conn.)—was a picture of Washington as usual: there was lobbying (Clemens visited with committee members, posing for pictures and signing autographs) followed by partisan squabbles, with Republicans taking the pitcher's side and Democrats favoring McNamee. This time, at least, there was also genuine comedy. We learned that the ever-beefy Clemens is not familiar with the word "vegan," for instance, and that one of the casualties of his alleged drug use was a pair of "designer pants" that he bled through; thereafter, McNamee claimed, Clemens travelled "with those little Band-Aids for his butt."

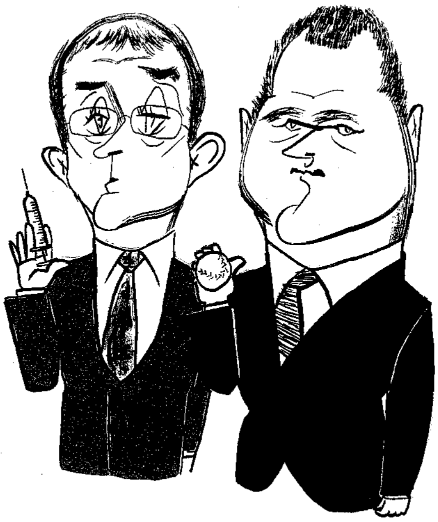
Much of the discussion worked its way back to Clemens's rump. Stephen Lynch (D., Mass.) questioned Clemens at length about a "palpable mass on his buttocks," the possible result of a Winstrol injection, and Clemens himself offered this essential defense: "I worked my butt off."

He seemed at times to mistake the hearing for a referendum on his pitching, and when he was reminded that, the night before a certain controversial barbecue, his team had lost, in extra innings, Clemens replied, "Obviously, there was a no-decision, I would imagine"—meaning that he personally could not have been charged as the losing pitcher.

That barbecue, which took place at the house of the prolific juicer Jose Canseco, brought out the lone poetic moment in McNamee's otherwise terse testimony: "As I was eating a sandwich next to Mr. Canseco's pool, by myself, I noticed a young child running towards the pool, and as I looked up there was a woman chasing after the young child, and she was wearing a peach bikini with green in it, with board shorts, and she was a thin, probably mid- to late-thirties, woman." She was the Clemenses' nanny, he learned, and her cameo served as a reminder that performance-enhancing drugs are truly a family affair. The Yankees pitcher Andy Pettitte, it turns out, got his human growth hormone from his father. Clemens testified that it was his late mother who, in 1988, inspired him to begin receiving Vitamin B_{12} injections in his rear—a practice that was endorsed by Darrell Issa (R., Calif.), who announced that his own mother, while "pre-menopausal," had taken B_{12} injections. And, of course, there was Debbie Clemens, Roger's wife, who was exposed as an H.G.H. user in 2003, when she, too, was a thin, late-thirties woman. The reason? She wanted to look good for the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue.

The *Sports Illustrated* pictures are still posted on Debbie Clemens's Web site, along with a personal statement that now offers new meaning. "I had major anxiety!" she says. "I was a 39-year-old mother of 4! Once I realized that this WAS going to be a reality, I decided I had to give it everything I had. My mind was set. I am not a risk taker, but have since learned that with great risk, sometimes comes great reward. The responses from that experience have been wonderful and I feel it was a turning point in my life." Debbie wore a floral-print blouse to Congress, concealing her now famous six-pack abs.

As it happens, the 2008 swimsuit issue arrived last week, featuring a bikini-clad Michelle Damon, wife of the Yankees outfielder Johnny Damon—whose name has also surfaced (thanks to his ex-wife) in the steroid follies. (He denies using.) In a quote accompanying her photograph, Michelle says, "They kept calling me Stallion because I was muscular and well-built, and the photographer kept smacking me on the butt because she really liked my butt." It may require a congressional subpoena to determine whether or not she received any injections.



Brian McNamee and Roger Clemens

—*Ben McGrath*

INK

SAY IT ALL IN SIX WORDS

Brevity: a good thing in writing. Exploited by texters, gossip columnists, haikuists. Not associated with the biography genre. But then—why shouldn't it be? Life expectancies rise; attention spans shrink. Six words can tell a story. That's a new book's premise, anyway. "Not Quite What I Was Planning." A compilation of teeny tiny memoirs. The forebear, it's assumed, is Hemingway. (Legend: he wrote a miniature masterpiece. "For sale: baby shoes, never worn." Slightly sappy, but a decent sixer.)

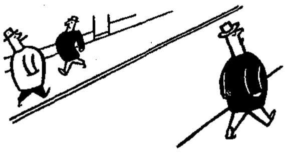
The book's originator: *SMITH* online magazine. It started as a reader contest: Your life story in six words. The magazine was flooded with entries. Five hundred-plus submissions per day. That's two, three words a minute. "We almost crashed," an editor said. Memoirs from plumbers and a dominatrix ("Fix a toilet, get paid crap"; "Woman Seeks Men—High Pain Threshold"). The editors have culled the best. And, happily, spliced in celebrity autobiographies: "Canada freezing. Gotham beckons. Hello, SI!" "Well, I thought it was funny." "Couldn't cope so I wrote songs." (Graydon Carter, Stephen Colbert, Aimee Mann.) Mario Batali makes a memorable appearance: "Brought it to a boil, often." So does Jimmy Wales, of Wikipedia: "Yes, you can edit this biography." Still, there are not nearly enough. Where's Eli Manning, and Katie Couric? ("Little brother; big game; last laugh"? "Morning girl goes serious at night"?) And what of the Presidential candidates? ("From Ill.; met Bill; iron will.") Something from Obama would be nice: "Hope is stronger than dope, kids!" A Canadian minister has done Jesus': "God called; Mother listened; I responded." Quieter lives can be condensed, too. The editors offer a few guidelines. "Try not to think too hard." That's from *SMITH's* editor, Larry Smith. It's impossible, of course, to follow. There's the temptation to be ironic: "Born in California. Then nothing happened." Or to blurt out something angry: "Everyone who loved me is dead." "Try to use specifics," Smith added. ("After Harvard, had baby with crackhead.") That doesn't rule out dazzling nonsense. "Eat mutate aura amateur auteur true" (Jonathan Lethem's nesting-doll-like memoir). Wistful recollections work; so does repetition: "Canoe guide, only got lost once." "Birth, childhood, adolescence, adolescence, adolescence, adolescence . . ." You could spend a lifetime brainstorming.

The book party: Housing Works, downtown. Cookies and beer on a table. Sticky notes and markers up front: "Write your memoir on your nametag!" In back, Alex Cummings, twenty-six ("Arab hillbilly goes to New York"). He's Egyptian, born in West Virginia. He'd come with his wife, Saira. She did not wear a nametag: "It's hard to summarize your life." Nearby was the author Maryrose Wood ("Divorced! Thank God for Internet personals"). She reminisced about a Sondheim show. She had been a chorus girl. She sang a lyric about divorces. "My career has come full circle." Next, Justin Taylor—reddish hair, beard ("Former child star seeks love, employment"). A onetime child model in Miami. He'd posed for German fashion magazines. "You wouldn't know, looking at me." The writer David Rakoff was there. He wasn't wearing a nametag, either. "I'm not really a nametag guy." He said he liked his memoir: "Love New York; Hate Self (Equally)." It was similar to his books. "The same sort of glib persona."

Julie Goss had driven from D.C. ("Inside suburban mom beats urban heart"). She was talking to Anthony Ramirez—a Metro reporter at the *Times*. He had submitted a memoir, too. The *SMITH* editors hadn't used it. Ramirez said his feelings were hurt: "I desperately wanted to get in." There was Summer Grimes, twenty-five. She's a hairdresser in St. Paul. She had written the book's title. It took "two minutes," she explained. She had forgotten all about it. Then *SMITH* sent her an e-mail: "Your contest entry has been chosen." She thought it was a scam. Then she saw the book—Amazon. She answered the next *SMITH* e-mail. They told her about the party. They sent a free book, too. Grimes opened it to her memoir: "Not quite what I was planning . . ." She wasn't sure about the ellipsis: "Now I'm totally second-guessing myself."

—*Lizzie Widdicombe*

PRESERVATION SOCIETY
THE KINK



Among the giants of the British Invasion, there was perhaps none more British than Ray Davies, the leader of the Kinks. The band, in its heyday, didn't even come to the United States; a four-year touring ban, following a dispute in 1965 with promoters and management, helped insure that Davies's songbook, esteemed as it is, would retain a recondite streak—and that Davies might be most enduringly imagined hiding out in Muswell Hill, composing rockers about London sunsets and afternoon tea.

And yet for many years, in stretches from the seventies into the nineties, Ray Davies was, very quietly, a New Yorker—an Upper West Sider, a regular at Zabar's and Café Lux. He had an apartment in the West Seventies near Central Park West, which, come to think, he wished he still had when he came to town last week to perform at a benefit at Carnegie Hall and promote a new solo album, "Working Man's Café." He was staying in a midtown boutique hotel with balky elevators and Euro-lounge lobby music. "Bloody awful," he declared as he emerged for a noontime tour of his old neighborhood.

He wore a trilby, Ray-Bans, a multicolored scarf, gray stovepipe jeans, and running shoes, and a skeptical expression that belied an affable mood. "The first time I came to New York, with the Kinks, in 1965, we stayed in the Hilton," he said, heading north on Broadway, toward Columbus Circle. "I was too intimidated to go out. Everybody went out and partied, but I stayed in. I got my six-pack—well, they weren't six-packs in those days—I got my crate of beer and just drank."

The Time Warner Center was news to him—"This went up really quickly"—but of little interest. As he walked uptown he pointed out landmarks: the homes or offices of various collaborators or friends—the remastering man, the press agent, the Broadway arranger, the actress from "The Edge of Night" whose story of the cast's singing its lines in rehearsals (out of boredom) inspired Davies to make the not-so-well-received concept album "The Kinks Present a Soap Opera."

Davies negotiated the traffic islands by Lincoln Center. Alice Tully Hall: "The Kinks did a gig here in the early seventies and somebody spiked my drink before I went on and I lasted about three songs before I passed out. We got through the show somehow. And afterwards I walked around the city all night, crying, because I'd let everybody down. My manager took me to Elaine's to cheer me up, but I was inconsolable. And I ended up at Howard Johnson's in Times Square. I was sitting there, it was like eight in the morning, and a guy next to me said, 'You've been up all night—who do you think you are?' And I said, 'I don't know who I am anymore.' It was this big black guy sitting next to me, and I said, 'Who are *you*?' And he said, 'My name is Joe Frazier and I'm the heavyweight champion of the world.' "

On Seventy-second Street, he stopped in front of the venerable old Tip Top shoe store. "I used to buy my stage shoes here," he said. "They were girls' shoes. Chrissie Evert, the tennis player, had a really great line that had a blue star on the side. I got the biggest size they had."

Farther east, toward the Park, was his local bar, a dive called Malachy's. He ducked in to say hello, although not to have a drink. ("I'm not a piss artist," he said.) He did the same at his old grocery market, Gotham Food, on Columbus Avenue. "Hey, Ray!" the checkout clerk called. "How are you?"

"Where's the big guy?" Davies asked.

"He's working tonight."

On his way in, Davies had said, "I used to see John Lennon in here." Asked to characterize these encounters, Davies muttered, "Politeness, politeness." He went on, "I watched 'Hard Day's Night' last night, on the Independent Film Channel, and I got quite caught up in it. I was so busy myself in those days I missed all that. A special bunch of people they were."

The northern apex of Davies's sentimental journey was a former Chinese takeout place on Seventy-sixth Street, now a Japanese restaurant, where Davies, picking up a takeout order, had once seen a member of the kitchen staff hit the owner over the head with a stool. "I put my money down, grabbed my food, and walked out," he recalled.

Davies, heading downtown, remarked on the persistence of locksmith shops and the absence of dog turds, then said, "I'm trying to find something that's been here forever," which had a ring to it. "This used to be a great, um—'used to be,' " he said, mocking himself. He recited the first line of a song he wrote recently: "I must remember never to say I remember." But it's easy to forget.

—*Nick Paumgarten*

THE FINANCIAL PAGE
THE STIMULUS STRATEGY

When President Bush signed into law last week a fiscal stimulus package of income-tax rebates and business tax breaks, it was the first good news for American consumers in a while. The plan will give many families a twelve-hundred-dollar windfall, and it comes with a message Americans always like to hear: we can spend our way to prosperity. Turning those checks into new televisions and T-bones, the argument goes, will keep recession away.

This is a familiar and popular idea—politicians on both sides of the aisle praised the plan—but it once seemed like heresy. In 1932, with America suffering through the Great Depression, Franklin Roosevelt, the Democratic candidate for President, attacked President Herbert Hoover for spending too much trying to fight the downturn. Hoover, he charged, was recklessly running up the deficit and driving the country toward "the poorhouse." The Democratic platform that year called for "an immediate and drastic" cut in government spending and a balanced budget.

Not for long, though. Soon after Roosevelt was elected, the nation's colossal unemployment rate and stagnant economy had him casting around for other solutions, including government-financed employment and public-works programs. At about the same time, the intellectual foundation for fiscal-stimulus plans was being laid out by John Maynard Keynes. Keynes argued that when fear made consumers and businessmen excessively cautious in their investing and spending, government could temporarily step in. Tax cuts or government-generated demand in the form of public spending could keep the country's factories and service centers humming until the "animal spirits" of consumers and businessmen rebounded.

Keynes's ideas were only halfheartedly tried during the New Deal. But after huge military spending on the Second World War—arguably the biggest fiscal-stimulus program in history—helped bring an end to the Depression, fiscal stimulus became a key policy weapon. In the nineteen-fifties, the Eisenhower Administration turned quickly to deficit spending when the economy slumped, and the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations later used Keynesian rhetoric to push for tax cuts and spending increases. In recent years, monetary policy, which works by changing interest rates, has superseded fiscal policy as the favored tool for jump-starting the economy. But when the U.S. economy stumbled in 2001 the Bush Administration quickly enacted a thirty-eight-billion-dollar tax-rebate plan.

Popular as Keynesian fiscal policy may be, many economists are skeptical that it works. They argue that fine-tuning the economy is a virtually impossible task, and that fiscal-stimulus programs are usually too small, and arrive too late, to make a difference. And since the money to pay for fiscal programs has to be borrowed and paid back in taxes, it's a wash for the economy as a whole. If the government gives you six hundred dollars but you know you're eventually going to have to pay six hundred dollars back in taxes, it may not feel like much of a gift. The economist Russell Roberts argues that using fiscal policy to get the economy going is like "taking a bucket of water from the deep end of a pool and dumping it into the shallow end."

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

The skeptics are right that fiscal policy isn't guaranteed to succeed. But theory and history suggest that there are circumstances in which making businessmen and consumers feel more flush can help a stalled economy. The Second World War is one example. Or take Japan: since the country's economy remained stagnant through the nineties despite hundreds of billions of dollars in public spending, its experience is often cited as an example of the futility of Keynesianism. But, as the macroeconomist Adam Posen has shown, Japan's real mistake was not in using fiscal stimulus but in failing to use it well—the government consistently spent less than was needed, and undercut its efforts in one year by raising taxes or cutting spending the next. On the single occasion when the government did wholeheartedly use fiscal policy, Japan's economy grew briskly. In the U.S., meanwhile, business tax breaks have helped spur investment booms at least four times since the early sixties, and recent work suggests that the 2001 rebate sharply boosted consumer spending.

Fiscal stimulus isn't a panacea, but it can be a useful tool if it's timely and targeted. On those counts, the new stimulus plan, though imperfect, is better than expected. It is certainly timely: the package was passed in only a few weeks, and the rebate checks will be out by May. It's not ideal in its targeting—Congress omitted policies that are especially effective in generating spending, including the extension of unemployment benefits and food stamps—but it does limit the rebates to families with incomes under a hundred and seventy-four thousand dollars. Given that two-thirds of all income taxes in the United States are paid by households that earn more than that, this is a startlingly redistributive move from an Administration not known for such measures. More important, it should make the stimulus plan more effective, because the people getting the rebates are not, for the most part, the people who will be paying for them. And since the wealthy save a far higher percentage of their incomes than the less well-off, the plan essentially takes money from people who would probably save it and gives it to those who will likely spend it. In the long run, this isn't sustainable—the current crisis has shown that Americans need to save more and borrow less. But in the short run a little spending spree could be just what an idling, anxious economy needs.

—*James Surowiecki*

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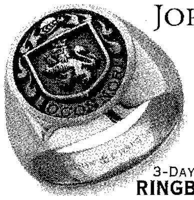

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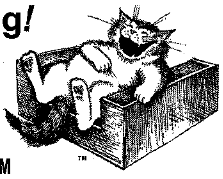

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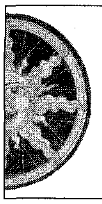

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THE POLITICAL SCENE

ON THE BUS

Can John McCain reinvent Republicanism?

BY RYAN LIZZA

John McCain's campaign bus, the Straight Talk Express, has had many incarnations. In 2000, when McCain competed against George W. Bush for the Republican Presidential nomination, the bus was a stage for his around-the-clock monologues with the press corps. For the 2008 campaign, the Straight Talk (as the McCain staff calls it) began as a state-of-the-art behemoth, as big as a tractor-trailer. Then, as McCain's fortunes fell—the campaign essentially went bankrupt over the summer—the sleek Straight Talk, which reportedly cost nine thousand dollars a day, was replaced by something that looked more like an actual bus. It is sixteen years old, not exactly shabby but definitely worn. It is usually trailed by a coach carrying McCain's travelling press, and, during most legs of the campaign trips, individual reporters are summoned to join the candidate on the Straight Talk. On a recent Sunday morning, two days before the January 29th Florida primary, the bus started up outside a television studio in Tampa, where McCain had just recorded his fifty-second appearance on "Meet the Press."

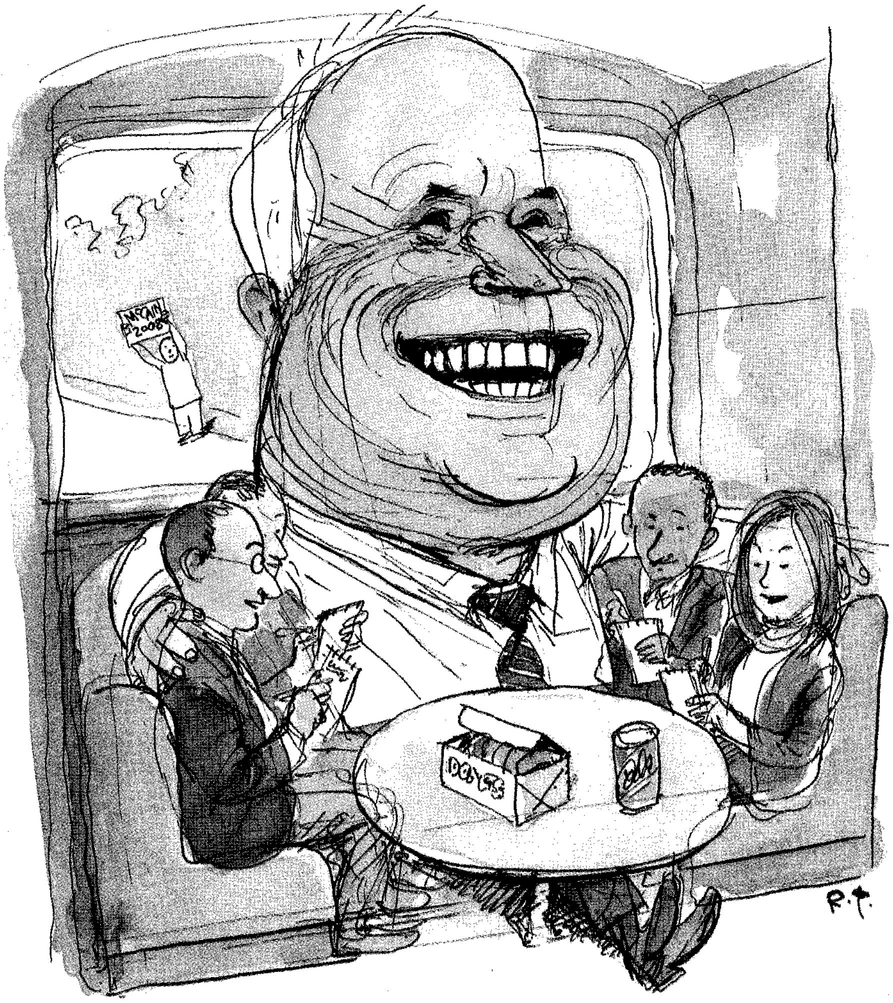
In the front of the bus are eight captain's chairs, where McCain's senior advisers and an assortment of family members sit. These include McCain's wife, Cindy; one of his senior strategists, Charlie Black, a quiet North Carolinian who heads one of Washington's biggest lobbying firms; Mark Salter, McCain's writing collaborator and longtime Senate chief of staff. Absent that Sunday morning were the Blogettes—McCain's daughter Meghan and two of her friends, who together write a lively online chronicle of their adventures on the campaign trail.

Past the captain's chairs, the center passageway narrows. On one side is a bathroom and on the other a galley stocked with Dunkin' Donuts and Coke, the staples of the McCain diet. McCain sits in the rear of the bus, at the center of a horseshoe-shaped gray leather couch—what is called the "circle lounge." In one corner, a television is tuned to MSNBC—never Fox News. As many as ten reporters squeeze around the horseshoe, until they are wedged thigh to thigh on either side of the Senator.

McCain, who is seventy-one, looks both older and more vigorous than he does on television, which tends to conceal the scars from a skin cancer. In person, he is all energy and motion. At one moment, bursting into laughter, he exuberantly explains why, after "a short period of waterboarding to find out what they did in their absence," he would take back some of the staffers who fled his campaign at its low point. At another, he cracks up over one of his own familiar jokes. That morning, he was talking on his cell phone to Governor Jon Huntsman, Jr., of Utah, who made a surprise endorsement of McCain back in 2006, passing over former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney, a fellow-Mormon. Huntsman has a warm relationship with McCain and has been mentioned as a possible running mate. Somewhat improbably, he was stumping for the Senator in Miami. "Thank you, my friend," McCain bellowed. "I just had my interrogation on Russert"—Tim Russert, the moderator of "Meet the Press." "It's a good thing I had all that preparation in North Vietnam!"

In fact, the candidate was eager to talk about his television interview. He reached into a breast pocket, pulled out an index card, and, referring to Russert, said, "You know how he always gives quotes? I had to give the Romney quote to *him.*" He held the card tightly with two hands and read, " 'No question we'll have to have a series of *timetables* and milestones. But those shouldn't be for public pronouncement. You don't want the enemy to understand how long they have to wait in the weeds till you're going to be gone.' " The quotation, referring to a U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, is from an interview that Romney gave last April to ABC's

"Good Morning America," and, in the days leading up to the Florida vote, McCain read it to anyone who would listen. He treated it as the Aha! moment of the campaign. As Democrats were calling for what McCain referred to as "surrender," Mitt Romney legitimized their argument by uttering the word "timetables." McCain said, "There's no other way you can interpret that, except that he was saying 'timetables.' That's all there is to it."



McCain has, in effect, stumbled to the head of a party brimming with ferment.

RICHARD THOMPSON

There was more to it. Romney was not proposing a specific date for withdrawal. He was suggesting that President Bush privately discuss timetables of some sort with the Iraqi government, though it was unclear exactly what he meant. McCain thought that he was on the verge of winning the Republican nomination because, while his Republican opponents hedged their bets, he had risked everything to support increasing the number of troops in Iraq—the "surge"—when the idea was at its most unpopular. The attack on Romney was unfair, even false, in its particulars, but McCain believed that Romney had shown the least backbone of all the candidates.

Somebody said to McCain that Romney had said he should apologize for twisting the intent of the words, and McCain became indignant: "He ought to apologize to the men and women who are serving, because they deserve steady and steadfast leadership, particularly when times are tough. And his statement obviously was looking for the blinking exit sign." He continued, "I remind you again, it's just a fact, that at that point, in April, 2007, it was at the *worst* point. Harry Reid"—the Senate Majority Leader—"is giving speeches on the floor of the Senate saying the war is *lost.* He didn't say, 'The surge isn't going to work,' he didn't say, 'We are going to fail.' He said it was lost. All the Democrats were outdoing each other: 'I'll get them out in six months,' 'No, I'll get them out in three months,' 'No, I'll get them out tomorrow,' 'I'll get 'em out. We're losing.' "

McCain showed a flash of anger. "And those same people were saying McCain's political ambitions are at an end. The fact is you also know that John Edwards was calling it 'the McCain strategy' and 'the McCain surge,' and not because he was trying to flatter me. That was a genuine seminal time as to whether we were going to go forward with the additional troops, which was, I admit, *highly* unpopular—highly unpopular." McCain picked up his index card. "Quote: 'You don't want the enemy to understand how long they have to wait in the weeds until you're going to be *gone.*' That's not helpful! That's not helpful!" He tapped the index card on the table as he pronounced each syllable. Another reporter gently tried to point out that Romney didn't support withdrawing the troops. McCain wouldn't yield: "If he didn't think that they were going to be gone, then he wouldn't have said that. It's just a statement of fact."

This episode, the final important volley of the Republican primaries, nicely captured two sides of McCain. There is the principled McCain, who, more than any other candidate running for President this year, has a record of sticking to a position even when it puts his political future at risk. In this campaign, his positions on the surge and on immigration (he supported a guest-worker program and a path to citizenship for illegals) almost sank him. But there is also the political McCain, who knows that a reputation for standing on principle is a valuable commodity, though only if it's well advertised. If it takes flogging a dodgy quote to emphasize a larger truth about your own character, then so be it.

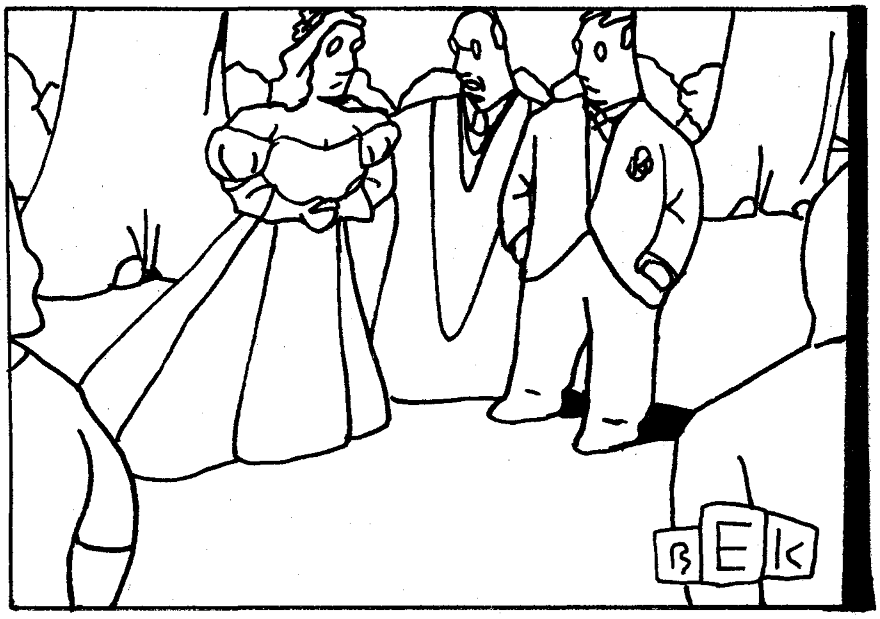
It is bracing to drop in on the McCain campaign after covering the overly managed productions of Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. The Democratic candidates rarely speak to the travelling press. McCain not only packs his bus with reporters (whom he often greets with an affectionate "Hello, jerks!") but talks until the room is filled with the awkward silence of journalists with no more questions. The Obama campaign, like the Bush White House, prides itself on message discipline and tracks down leakers with a frightening intensity. McCain and his aides openly discuss strategy, whether it's Brooke Buchanan, McCain's travelling press secretary, prepping him for a press conference (“ABC might ask about that”) or McCain discussing his targeting strategy for Tampa (“I thought we did a robo-call to tell people about Schwarzkopf”—referring to the endorsement by General Norman Schwarzkopf).

The intimacy of the bus means that McCain’s family life is an open book. (Cindy is dismayed that their son Jack recently split up with his girlfriend; John has turned his daughter Meghan’s status as an unemployed art-history grad into a punch line.) The chumminess with the press usually spills into the evenings, and McCain’s senior advisers dine almost nightly with the people covering the candidate.

McCain’s open-access policy is partly strategic. After all, he is able to hammer talking points like any politician. (It’s not just his jokes that he repeats.) But, by engaging reporters in long, even substantive conversations, he also disarms them. The incentive to ask “gotcha” questions that feed the latest news cycle is greatly reduced, and the hours of exposure to McCain breed a relationship that inclines journalists to be more careful about describing the context of his statements. Mark Salter believes that McCain’s back-of-the-bus rambles rarely produce gaffes. “Ten per cent of the time, something like that is going to happen,” he said. “But ninety per cent of the time it works out fine. If you just make your case, and reporters are familiar with you and know how you talk and know what you mean when you’re bouncing around on a bus and you truncate your sentences or something, then they know what you’re driving at, and you’re going to be fine.”

All this access isn’t just a calculated risk; McCain has a near-clinical need to be around people. And his extended soliloquies are also a way for him to mock his reputation, well deserved, according to accounts of some of his Senate colleagues over the years, for having an explosive temper. “I do enjoy the company of some people that I’ve gotten to know who are professional journalists,” he says. “They’ll write things or report things that I don’t want to see, and I get mad as hell about it and enraged and lose my temper and want to punch them out. But the fact is, I think you can enjoy life.”

In the months before Super Tuesday, on February 5th, the essential elements of the McCain campaign were the Straight Talk and the town-hall meeting. In these forums, he won two crucial constituencies—the press and the voters. He succeeded not because of his ideology but, to some extent, in spite of it. He won over reporters because they took pleasure in his company as well as in his rebellious persona, and he won over a plurality of primary and caucus voters because the conservative majority in most key states was divided between two of his opponents, Mike Huckabee, the former Arkansas governor, and Mitt Romney. “McCain is a minority nominee who was fortunate to have the conservative vote consistently split,” Newt Gingrich, the former House Speaker, told me. “And he probably would have lost the nomination had there been a conservative able to unify the conservative movement.”



“Do you, Eleanor, agree to be exhausted as one?”

McCain was lucky in other ways, too. A series of unlikely events, beyond his control, had to unfold in order for him to win. “He did it by drawing an inside straight,” Mark McKinnon, McCain’s media adviser, told me two days after Super Tuesday. “A hundred things had to happen, most of them improbable, and ninety-nine have so far. The key things had to be the success of the surge, reduction of the heat on immigration, somebody having to take out Romney in Iowa”—the January 3rd Iowa caucus, which Huckabee won. “Rudy”—Rudolph Giuliani, the former New York mayor—“had to pull out of New Hampshire. If Rudy hadn’t pulled out of New Hampshire, Romney would have won, because we would have split the votes with Giuliani.” And it didn’t hurt that Huckabee, McCain’s principal adversary in the January 20th South Carolina primary, made a tactical mistake on the eve of the vote. “Huckabee should have stayed in South Carolina, instead of going to Michigan and spending two, three days and a million bucks,” McKinnon said.

McCain has, in effect, stumbled to the head of his party. As he was reminded when conservative talk-radio hosts led a last-minute insurrection against his candidacy in the run-up to Super Tuesday, it is a party brimming with ideological ferment. Conservative journals are full of debates about the meaning of McCainism, and publishing houses are releasing tracts by conservatives trying to point the Party in a new direction. Two voices from the nineties and two from the Bush era offer a glimpse of the landscape that McCain faces as he tries to put the Party back together.

Newt Gingrich and Grover Norquist were architects of the conservative ascendancy in the Clinton years, but the two men now offer visions for the future that are at odds. Gingrich’s prescription is most notable for what he explicitly rejects. The leader of the Republican takeover of the House in 1994, Gingrich now argues that the era of running against the government has ended. “The Republican Party cannot win over time as the permanently angry anti-government party because neither appeals to most voters," he writes in his recent book, "Real Change." Rather, he argues, Republicans must learn to be competent *managers* of the bureaucracy and "pro-good government." Furthermore, he advises them to reject the Party's guiding strategy of the past eight years: making increasingly urgent appeals to its most conservative supporters for maximum turnout. In what sounds like the advice that New Democrats gave liberals in the nineteen-eighties, Gingrich points out that "Republicans allow their campaigns to be dominated more and more by pandering to small, specific segments of the activist wing of the party"—a trend that he believes has contributed to the drop in Republican numbers on the two coasts. Gingrich's advice amounts to a sharp rebuke of the dominant political and governing philosophy of the Bush years—in particular, the strategies formulated and advocated by Bush's former political adviser Karl Rove—and he suggests that if McCain attempts a dramatic refashioning of his party he may find support in surprising places.

Norquist, a longtime conservative organizer, has a different view. In a forthcoming book, "Leave Us Alone," he describes the Republican Party as little more than a collection of interest groups—such as anti-tax activists, gun-rights advocates, and homeschoolers—that, if they are carefully tended, will grow into a "supermajority." The merits of his argument aside, Norquist's description of the conservative coalition is notable for what it leaves out—voters whose overriding concern is national security. That exclusion seems to be a trend on the small-government right. Not long ago, I spoke with Mallory Factor, a Republican fund-raiser and the co-organizer of a monthly meeting for conservative thinkers and activists in New York. When I mentioned that McCain's aides plan to use the Iraq war to unite the right, he said, "That's not the glue that keeps conservatives together. There is an enormous amount of frustration over the war on a number of grounds, from the cost, to the way the war has been fought, to what the outcome is. One of the things that I've talked about in our group is that we're using the finest military in the world as an N.G.O. I mean, we're talking about nation-building, not fighting a war. Is that the proper use of our military?"

Factor has reason to be concerned. In a recent *Foreign Affairs* article, McCain called for the kind of costly nation-building capacity that makes libertarians shudder, arguing that the United States should "energize and expand our postconflict reconstruction capabilities" and create a "deployable police force" that would prop up collapsing states. Echoing Norquist's book, Factor insisted that the war in Iraq is not a unifying issue for the right. He told me, "The bottom line is that to the base of the Party the war isn't Communism—to the Republican Party under Ronald Reagan, Communism was a rallying point. This is not like that."

David Frum and Michael Gerson are former Bush-era colleagues who, like Gingrich and Norquist, now see the world very differently. Both were White House speechwriters—best known as two of the three authors who claim to have given birth to the phrase "axis of evil." Last fall, Gerson, now a Washington *Post* columnist, published a book called "Heroic Conservatism," which reads like a defense of a Bush legacy that Gerson wanted to create while he worked in the White House but which bears no resemblance to Bush's actual Presidency.

Gerson's book, though, is a reminder that Bush's original campaign slogan, "compassionate conservatism," was meant to signal a rejection of the anti-government conservatism of the nineteen-nineties. One of Gerson's early speeches for Bush attacked any governing philosophy with "no higher goal, no nobler purpose than 'leave us alone' "—a Norquist battle cry even then. As a Presidential candidate in 1999, Bush criticized House Republicans for balancing the budget "on the backs of the poor," and Gerson slipped into one of Bush's speeches a veiled shot at Robert Bork, the Supreme Court nominee rejected by the Reagan-era Senate. ("Too often, on social issues, my party has painted an image of America slouching towards Gomorrah," Bush said. Bork, whose 1996 book "Slouching Towards Gomorrah" was a sour indictment of an America in decline, responded, "Mr. Bush evidently thinks conservatives are another species altogether.") But, once in the White House, Gerson proved far more influential in injecting compassionate conservatism into Bush's speeches than into his policies. These days, Gerson is trying to resurrect the case for the role of government in addressing problems of poverty, disease, and education.

Frum, in his new book, "Comeback: Conservatism That Can Win Again," warns conservatives about social trends that may overwhelm the Republican Party. He notes that Republicans have lost a generation of young voters during the Bush years. "The people who turned twenty between 1985 and 1990 were eight points more Republican than Democratic," he told me. "People who turned twenty between 1970 and 1975 were eight points more Democratic than Republican. People who turned twenty between 2000 and 2005 are twelve points more Democratic." He sees a country moving slightly to the left as Republicans are "left stranded on the right." He told me, "If what you are is a pragmatic, business-oriented, moderate-minded person who wants things to work in a fairly competent and ethical way, and you're under thirty—the kind of person who would have been an Eisenhower Republican and a Republican in the Nixon years and in the George H. W. Bush years—you are a Democrat today." Frum added, "As the country becomes more single, more childless, more secular, more non-white, more immigrant, it becomes more Democratic. And all of those groups are growing." Frum has ideas on how conservatives can reverse this trend, but his most radical thought is that, given the realities of the federal budget and the public's unwillingness to curb entitlement spending, Republicans need to rethink their approach to tax cuts. He proposes making a deal with Democrats in which some of the Bush tax cuts become permanent in exchange for a carbon tax to deal with the global-warming crisis.

McCain has modified his rhetoric on immigration and made peace with Jerry Falwell, whom he described in 2000 as an agent of "intolerance." But his promise to make permanent the Bush tax cuts, which he twice voted against—once calling them an affront to his "conscience"—is probably his most brazen pandering. "There is this terrible gravitational pull when candidates need to reconnect with the Party base," Frum said. "When you have a Giuliani or a McCain who has been innovative and moved to issues where there's a lot of potential appeal, the issue where they keep on being yanked back—the test of orthodoxy—is on the tax issue. That's the thing that the Party demands from its leader. And it's just lethal."

McCain's tax-cutting pledge points to a dilemma of his campaign. Having become the presumptive nominee on the strength of support from moderates and independents, he is being forced to start the general election by trying to attract conservatives. McCain regularly boasts that he was a "foot soldier in the Reagan revolution"; on the night of February 12th, after his victories in Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia, he used some of the most generic Republican language of the campaign, ticking off a string of small-government platitudes. ("We don't believe that government has all the answers," "We don't believe in growing the size of government," and so on.) Oddly, McCain is attempting to portray himself as a doctrinaire conservative just when the intellectual class of the movement seems eager for something new.

Gingrich, Gerson, and Frum all reject the anti-government ethos that has come to define conservatism. Gingrich calls for managerial competence in government. Gerson asks for expanded programs to fight poverty at home and to combat AIDS abroad. Frum recommends making peace with the realities of the welfare state. Other conservatives have attacked these views, and perhaps the Frums and Gingriches are simply out of touch with the grass roots of their party. However, these disputes also suggest that McCain, if he can tame his right-wing critics—and Mitt Romney's endorsement last week will only help—may have a rare opportunity to reinvent what it means to be a Republican.

Conversations on the Straight Talk are not always about McCain's views on Iraq or tax reform or, really, substantive issues of any kind. Rather, the scene consists of long stretches of banter punctuated by short, intense discussions of politics and policy. A rotating cast of characters—the loyalists who have stuck with him, some without pay—provide comic relief and distraction when McCain becomes bored or wants to change the subject. Steve Schmidt, one of the campaign's chief strategists, is usually perched on a ledge in a corner of the lounge. He is thirty-seven, has a shaved head, and often wears a Bluetooth earpiece, which gives him a menacing and futuristic look. Schmidt worked for the unflinchingly conservative Dick Cheney in 2005, and for California's pragmatic, moderate governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, in 2006. On the bus, his role is to play a sort of Ed McMahon to McCain's Johnny Carson. McCain refers to him as Sergeant Schmidt and usually greets him in a gravelly voice through a clenched jaw—"Fall in!"—that mimics a hard-nosed military commander. One of McCain's running gags is that Schmidt was temporarily demoted to corporal after McCain lost the Michigan primary to Mitt Romney, on January 15th, and, because Schmidt has been working without a salary, McCain makes the obvious joke: "You get what you pay for." McCain's entire conversational style is built on anecdotes, and he often turns to Schmidt to dispense wisdom when the conversation moves into the political tall grass. "Maybe we can get a word of analysis from Sergeant Schmidt?" McCain will say after a question about exit polls or Hillary Clinton's campaign strategy. Schmidt replies with some banal talking points or an extended soliloquy, depending on his interest in the question. Once, in Florida, McCain asked if the enthusiasm of the final rally of the day, in Lady Lake, was a sign of the campaign's momentum. Schmidt looked up from his BlackBerry and nodded: "It is."

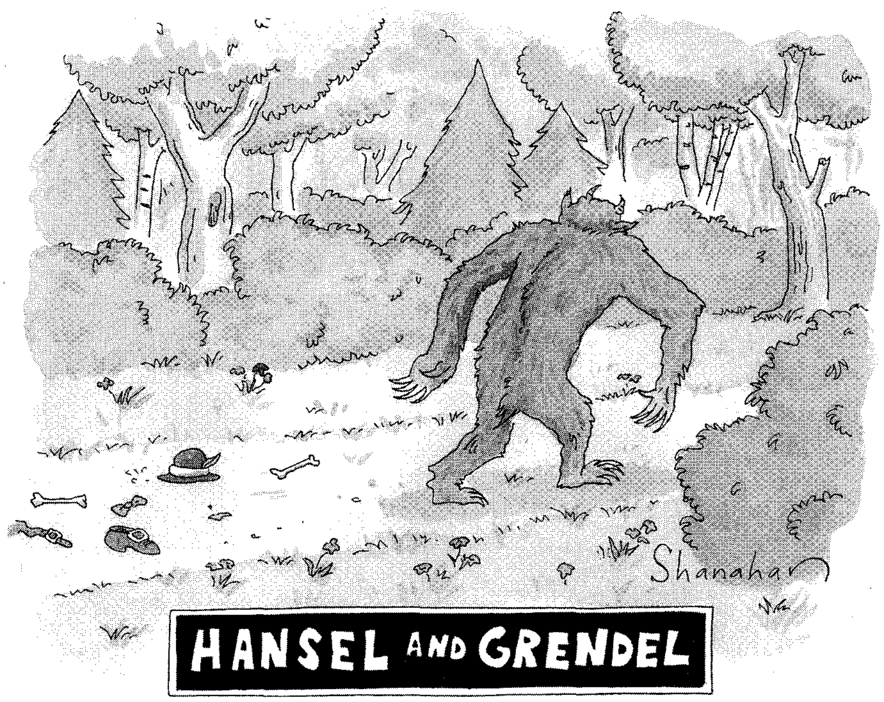
At other times, Schmidt comes alive as a sort of political Rain Man. During one back-of-the-bus conversation, he explained that in 2004, when he was working for Bush's reëlection, "we targeted voters not where they lived but how they lived their lives, in the same way that credit-card companies do." He went on, "And so we know, for instance, that among independent voters there are life styles and behaviors that identify them as Republicans or Democrats. For example, the GMC Yukon is a Republican vehicle, and Volvos and Subarus are the most Democratic vehicles. Republicans have Fiji water preferences, versus Democrats, who have Evian water preferences. You have a huge grouping of consumer data, so you can microtarget messages to common groups, finding pleasure points and anger points on issues."

South Carolina's senior senator, Lindsey Graham, plays a similar role in the McCain campaign, though he is treated more like Sideshow Bob, from "The Simpsons." "We went into South Carolina with a millstone around my neck called Lindsey Graham," McCain told reporters one day, reminiscing about that primary. (Graham, like McCain, has championed immigration reform—"Lindsey *Grahamnesty*," Rush Limbaugh calls him—and opposed some of the Bush Administration's terrorist-detention policies.) McCain is superstitious. He carries a penny that the publisher of the New Hampshire *Union Leader* gave him for good luck. Graham served a similar purpose—as a lucky charm. The night of McCain's Florida victory, Graham, sipping a Baileys on ice, noted that McCain's superstitiousness was forcing him to remain on the campaign trail. "I have to get *home*," he complained, half joking that McCain was keeping him hostage.

McCain can be combative and irritable in his town-hall meetings. At one Florida event, when a woman revealed that she was a lawyer, McCain interrupted to tell one of his favorite, not entirely fresh jokes: "What's the difference between a catfish and a lawyer?" Answer: "One is a scum-sucking bottom dweller, and the other is a fish!" McCain smiled, seeming pleased with himself. At the same event, two women held anti-McCain placards. One said, "Senator McCain, tell Florida why you don't support us!!" The other asked, "Senator McCain, why do you hate Florida?" The signs were apparently references to McCain's opposition to a national catastrophe fund that would help reduce the cost of insurance in hurricane-prone areas. During a rambling question about hospitals, a voter mentioned that even evangelicals and atheists could agree. McCain responded, "What about the Trotskyites? There's a couple of them over there. They have signs."

One day on the Straight Talk, McCain discussed what he was reading. It is safe to say that Gingrich, Norquist, Gerson, and Frum were not on his nightstand; McCain is almost always looking at military histories or political biographies. In the 2000 campaign, he seemed to be reading a lot about Theodore Roosevelt, and he frequently worked T.R. anecdotes into his conversations. These days, he often cites William Manchester, a former marine and a Second World War veteran, who has written biographies of Winston Churchill and General Douglas MacArthur. When a reporter asked

McCain what would happen if he lost the Florida primary, he went off on a Manchester tangent. "The first thing is that Schmidt would be court-martialled," he said. "And although we abandoned flogging as a tradition in the British Navy we would reinstate flogging, and he would be tied to the yardarm and flogged." Schmidt did not look up from his BlackBerry. McCain continued, "Did you ever hear the story about Winston Churchill when he became the first Lord of the Admiralty and did away with all the old British naval regulations which had been in effect since Lord Nelson, including flogging, which was still in the naval regulations of the British Royal Navy? He was at a reception—like all Churchill stories, this may or may not be true—and a retired British admiral came up to him and said, 'Sir Winston, you have destroyed British naval traditions.' And Churchill said, 'Sir, the British Royal Navy only has three traditions: rum, sodomy, and the lash.' I think it's in Manchester's book, 'The Last Lion.'"



HANSEL AND GRENDEL

Recently, McCain said, he had read "The Coldest Winter," David Halberstam's account of the Korean War and its era. "I strongly recommend it," he told the reporters. "It's beautifully done. It's not just about the war, but it's a very good description, whether you agree with it or not, of the political climate at that time—the split in the Republican Party between the Taft wing"—Senator Robert Taft, of Ohio—"and the Eisenhower wing, and Harry Truman's incredible relationship with MacArthur." He added, "At least half the book is about the political situation in the United States during that period—the isolationism, who lost China, the whole political dynamic. That's what I think makes it well worth reading."

It was a telling reference and points to McCain's transformation between 2000 and 2008—from a Teddy Roosevelt Republican to an Eisenhower Republican. In 2000, McCain railed against corporate power and the influence of lobbyists and money in politics. Today, the only mention of corporations in his stump speech is a demand that the corporate-tax rate be lowered. After 2000, McCain seemed briefly to be considering leaving the Republican Party, just as Roosevelt had. But, once terrorism and the war in Iraq became the preëminent issues, he decided instead to take over the Party, just as Eisenhower and the Republican moderates did when, in 1952, they vanquished the Old Guard isolationists who supported Taft. Instead of battling the corporate wing of his party, McCain has decided that it's the isolationists—a group that he defines broadly, and which includes the left and the right—who are the real threat.

One afternoon, McCain talked about his surprise at the resurrection of this element in his party, which has been particularly visible in the candidacy of the libertarian Texas congressman Ron Paul. "We had a debate in Iowa. I mean, it was, like, last summer, one of the first debates we had. It was raining, and I'm standing there in the afternoon, it was a couple of hours before the debate," McCain said. "And I happen to look out the window. Here's a group of fifty people in the rain, shouting 'Ron *Paul!* Ron *Paul!*'" McCain banged on the table with both fists and chanted as he imitated the Paul enthusiasts. "I thought, Holy shit, what's going on here? I mean, go to one of these debates. Drive up. Whose signs do you see? I'm very grateful—they've been very polite. I recognize them and say thanks for being here. They haven't disrupted the events. But he has tapped a vein. And it's a combination of isolationism, the old part of our party, and the conspiracy. You know"—McCain lowered his head and spoke in a mock-confiding voice—"'We have made an important discovery: the headquarters for the organization that's going to merge three countries into one—Canada, Mexico, and the U.S.—is in Kansas City!'"

McCain is careful not to mock the broader libertarian right, which makes up a far larger share of his party than Paul's followers do. Nonetheless, his victory is a repudiation of small-government conservatism, a development not seen in the years of Barry Goldwater, Reagan, and the two Bushes. "For the first time since Eisenhower," Newt Gingrich told me, "you have someone who has clearly not accommodated the conservative wing winning the nomination. That is a remarkable achievement."

"Hey, Brooke!" McCain yelled into the galley, as we made our way from St. Petersburg to Tampa. "Have we got any coffee?" Although Brooke Buchanan is technically the travelling press secretary, in a campaign that has been forced to do more with less, she also serves as his "body woman," taking care of everything from spraying down stray strands of hair before he faces the cameras to making sure that he's well caffeinated. As McCain bantered with reporters, his paragraphs were often interrupted mid-thought with a loud request for Buchanan, usually concerning the temperature. “It’s a little warm, Brooke!” he shouted during one trip. It was still too hot a while later, when McCain went on to discuss Hillary Clinton’s progress in the Democratic race: “A lot of people, after Iowa, said she’s not going to win New Hampshire, and she was able to really out-campaign Senator Obama, I think, is my observation. It’s still hot in here, Brooke, and you’re fired! Don’t get on the bus at the next stop! Remember when Senator Dole left his staff on the tarmac in Iowa or wherever it was?”

The surest sign of affection from McCain is this kind of steady, sarcastic abuse, and Buchanan is clearly well liked. “She’s probably still trying to repair her cell phone, which she dropped because she’s shaky from last night’s consumption,” McCain chided her. “You know, she’s been out to Betty Ford’s place twice, and we’re just sort of hoping for the best. One day at a time. We had a little slip last night.”

This crack set eyes rolling among the assembled reporters. McCain has been doing a version of the Straight Talk show for so long that the veterans know all the lines. “I haven’t heard that Betty Ford thing in a while,” Jill Zuckman, a reporter for the Chicago *Tribune*, said. McCain laughed mischievously, like someone who knows he has just been figured out. “Nothing is new! Nothing is new! Nothing is new!” he said, throwing his hands up. “One thing we know on this bus is nothing is new.”

Later in the day, on the way to Orlando, a new reporter entered the circle lounge and wedged herself into the horseshoe next to McCain.

“And you are?” McCain asked.

“Katie Connolly, with *Newsweek*.”

“*Newsweek*? Are you on a work release or drug rehab?”

“Both, actually.”

“Well, we hope you get better.” After shouting at Brooke for some coffee—“in contravention to every one of my instructions and orders, we’ll let you back in on a provisional basis”—McCain then earnestly thanked the reporters for joining him. “The nice thing about this campaign is when you’re with your friends,” he said. “That makes it so much better and so much more enjoyable.”

“It’s nice that you say that about me, seeing as we only just met,” Connolly said.

“Ha! I see we’ve got another smart-ass on the bus.”

“I heard that was a condition of entry.”

“That is a condition of entry—sarcasm, lack of sincerity,” McCain assented. Schmidt chimed in from his spot in the corner: “And willingness to laugh at the same jokes.”

Many conservatives are anguished about the prospect of a McCain Presidency. Rick Santorum, a former Republican senator from Pennsylvania, has summarized the right’s case against McCain. “He has opposed pro-growth tax cuts and supported limits on political speech,” Santorum wrote in the Philadelphia *Inquirer* last week. “He has pushed amnesty when it came to illegal immigration and half-measures when it came to interrogating terrorists. He wants to close Guantánamo and allow the reimportation of prescription drugs into the United States. Not only does he part company with conservatives on these and other issues—climate change, drilling for oil in the Alaskan hinterland, federal funding of embryonic stem-cell research, international criminal courts, gun-show background checks—he invariably adopts the rhetoric of the left and stridently leads the opposition.” Working with a Democratic Congress, a President McCain could well pass half the agenda that Republicans have been fighting against for the past decade.

McCain has also surrounded himself with the sort of Republicans who make conservatives nervous. In the weeks before Super Tuesday, a *Who’s Who* of moderate—or at least maverick—Republicans joined McCain on his bus. In Florida, McCain was aligned with Governor Charlie Crist, who won the primary in 2006 as a moderate opposed by a right-wing opponent. Crist made his name in state politics by championing civil rights, opposing federal meddling in the Terri Schiavo case, and, as governor, making the environment a signature issue. In Florida political circles, Crist’s endorsement of McCain was also seen as snubbing the conservative political machine of Jeb Bush, which was behind Romney. On the eve of Crist’s election, in 2006, George W. Bush went to Florida to campaign, but Crist conspicuously found himself in another part of the state.

The day after Crist’s endorsement of McCain, the Straight Talk picked up two senators—Joe Lieberman, the Connecticut Independent, and Mel Martinez, a Florida Republican. Aside from the war and national-security issues, Lieberman, who is also a close friend of McCain’s, still votes with the Democrats on most questions. Martinez’s recent political views (like McCain’s) have been shaped by his battles with the right. He was nominated by President Bush to be General Chairman of the Republican National Committee, which set off a fierce internal battle over Martinez’s views on immigration. The Republican Party of Texas even passed a resolution rejecting the Martinez nomination. Last year, the Senator abruptly resigned from the post, with little explanation; a few months later, he endorsed McCain. During the bus ride, there wasn’t much policy discussion among the three senators. “The best chick flick of the season is ‘Atonement,’ ” Martinez observed, during one typical conversation. “Keira Knightley. She’s not hard to look at for a while!” But when he got to discussing the abuse of earmarks—one of McCain’s defining issues—Martinez defended the federal government’s role, as opposed to the prerogatives of individual members of Congress, in deciding how money should be spent. “Some would say if I didn’t earmark it then the bureaucrat would get to decide where the money went,” he said. “Well, I’m sorry, but it isn’t a bureaucrat but an authorized program that otherwise gets the funding.”

When the McCain entourage arrived in California after the Florida primary, Arnold Schwarzenegger endorsed him. So did Rudy Giuliani, who dropped out after the Florida primary. Most of these politicians have figured out how to thrive as Republicans at a time when the President’s approval ratings are in the low thirties. McCain’s advisers sometimes point to Schwarzenegger as a model, and it was, after all, the McCain strategist Steve Schmidt who helped guide Schwarzenegger to the political center—and sustained popularity.

As McCain approached Super Tuesday, he sometimes ticked off a list of Republican elders who are backing him: former New Hampshire Senator Warren

Rudman, former Tennessee Senator Howard Baker, former Missouri Senator Jack Danforth, Senator Pete Domenici, of New Mexico. Between the South Carolina and Florida primaries, when Rush Limbaugh devoted his radio show to attacking McCain, saying that he would "destroy the Republican Party," Bob Dole, the former Senate Majority Leader, came to McCain's defense, by writing Limbaugh a letter in which he described McCain as a mainstream conservative. This elder generation of McCainiacs governed during the era of conservative ascendancy, but they were not the champions of the movement's rise.

Referring to the people with whom McCain has surrounded himself, Gingrich noted, "I think they consistently represent a more moderate wing. And I think this is the victory of the moderate wing for the moment. But I think that's partially due to a collapse of the DeLay wing of the Party"—former Texas Representative Tom DeLay—"and secondarily a collapse of the Rove-Bush wing of the Party."

On February 3rd, two days before Super Tuesday, McCain watched the Super Bowl in the lobby bar of a Boston Hyatt, together with reporters and Joe Lieberman and Lindsey Graham. (Graham to Lieberman at one point in the evening: "What kind of kosher food do you eat during football?") The next morning, the campaign flew down to Hamilton, New Jersey, and went from there to Grand Central Terminal, where McCain was to pick up the endorsement of former New York Governor George Pataki, a onetime pillar of the moderate wing of the G.O.P. Rudy Giuliani, who boarded the bus in Hamilton, sat in the circle lounge, hunched over the table across from McCain. Giuliani usually travels with a Secret Service-like security detail, but he had shed this entourage and awkwardly crammed himself between a couple of reporters. Whatever else one says about Giuliani's unhappy run for the Presidency—he spent at least forty-eight million dollars and won one delegate—he was fairly steadfast in his views on many issues important to conservatives, especially abortion. He seemed relieved that McCain, rather than Romney, appears destined to win the nomination, and made the argument that McCain was the only candidate who could broaden the Republican Party.

"When I endorsed John, I pointed out that, as far as I can see, he's the only candidate we have that can put virtually fifty states in play," Giuliani said, pouring out some carefully worded frustrations about how his party has shrivelled in the Northeast. "That doesn't mean he can win fifty states. Nobody ever wins fifty states. It means he can compete in fifty states. When he's nominated, there'll be an active campaign in New York, there'll be an active campaign in New Jersey, Connecticut, Michigan, Minnesota, California, Washington, Oregon. If somebody else is nominated, they'll go back to the thirty-five-state strategy. This is very frustrating for Republicans in this part of the world. They haven't had a Presidential campaign since probably '84, maybe '88 in some places. It's also helped to deteriorate the Party." Left unsaid were the actual issues that McCain would have to run on to win in places like New York and California, where Schwarzenegger has been successful by adopting a liberal environmental agenda and shunning the national G.O.P.

McCain chimed in. "California, basically, has been written off by the Republican Party," he said. "We go there for their money, and then we don't come back at election time. And nobody's been more eloquent about that than Governor Schwarzenegger. He said, 'We're sick and tired of it,' several times. One of the reasons the Governor endorsed me is he knows I'll compete in California."

Two days later, McCain travelled to Washington to speak to conservatives at the annual convention of the Conservative Political Action Conference, where he blandly reassured them that he was one of them—that the conservative base had nothing to fear from his ascendancy. (To judge from the boos McCain received when he spoke, some of that dread remains.) On the ride to New York with Giuliani, as McCain talked about his plan for the general-election campaign, he seemed to be saying something different. In effect, he was arguing, along with Gingrich and others, that the era of Karl Rove was over. "The old strategy of just going to certain states and solidifying the base—I don't think that works anymore," he said, adding, "Not only that, but I think it would be boring." ♦

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Ryan Lizza talks about the Presidential race.

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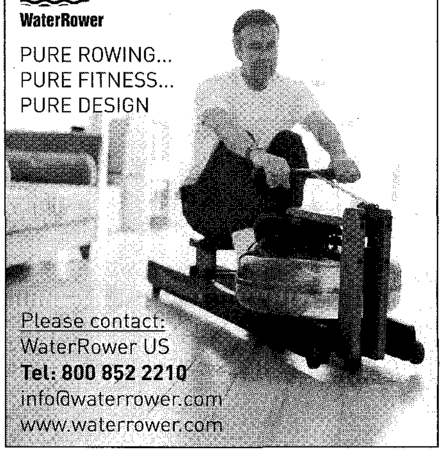

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ANNALS OF AMERICAN HISTORY

THE WATER CURE

Debating torture and counterinsurgency—a century ago.

BY PAUL KRAMER

Many Americans were puzzled by the news, in 1902, that United States soldiers were torturing Filipinos with water. The United States, throughout its emergence as a world power, had spoken the language of liberation, rescue, and freedom. This was the language that, when coupled with expanding military and commercial ambitions, had helped launch two very different wars. The first had been in 1898, against Spain, whose remaining empire was crumbling in the face of popular revolts in two of its colonies, Cuba and the Philippines. The brief campaign was pitched to the American public in terms of freedom and national honor (the U.S.S. Maine had blown up mysteriously in Havana Harbor), rather than of sugar and naval bases, and resulted in a formally independent Cuba.

The Americans were not done liberating. Rising trade in East Asia suggested to imperialists that the Philippines, Spain's largest colony, might serve as an effective "stepping stone" to China's markets. U.S. naval plans included provisions for an attack on the Spanish Navy in the event of war, and led to a decisive victory against the Spanish fleet at Manila Bay in May, 1898. Shortly afterward, Commodore George Dewey returned the exiled Filipino revolutionary Emilio Aguinaldo to the islands. Aguinaldo defeated Spanish forces on land, declared the Philippines independent in June, and organized a government led by the Philippine élite.

During the next half year, it became clear that American and Filipino visions for the islands' future were at odds. U.S. forces seized Manila from Spain—keeping the army of their ostensible ally Aguinaldo from entering the city—and President William McKinley refused to recognize Filipino claims to independence, pushing his negotiators to demand that Spain cede sovereignty over the islands to the United States, while talking about Filipinos' need for "benevolent assimilation." Aguinaldo and some of his advisers, who had been inspired by the United States as a model republic and had greeted its soldiers as liberators, became increasingly suspicious of American motivations. When, after a period of mounting tensions, a U.S. sentry fired on Filipino soldiers outside Manila in February, 1899, the second war erupted, just days before the Senate ratified a treaty with Spain securing American sovereignty over the islands in exchange for twenty million dollars. In the next three years, U.S. troops waged a war to "free" the islands' population from the regime that Aguinaldo had established. The conflict cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of Filipinos and about four thousand U.S. soldiers.

Within the first year of the war, news of atrocities by U.S. forces—the torching of villages, the killing of prisoners—began to appear in American newspapers. Although the U.S. military censored outgoing cables, stories crossed the Pacific through the mail, which wasn't censored. Soldiers, in their letters home, wrote about extreme violence against Filipinos, alongside complaints about the weather, the food, and their officers; and some of these letters were published in home-town newspapers. A letter by A. F. Miller, of the 32nd Volunteer Infantry Regiment, published in the Omaha *World-Herald* in May, 1900, told of how Miller's unit uncovered hidden weapons by subjecting a prisoner to what he and others called the "water cure." "Now, this is the way we give them the water cure," he explained. "Lay them on their backs, a man standing on each hand and each foot, then put a round stick in the mouth and pour a pail of water in the mouth and nose, and if they don't give up pour in another pail. They swell up like toads. I'll tell you it is a terrible torture."

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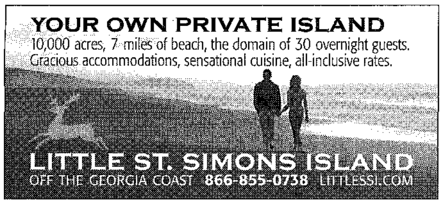

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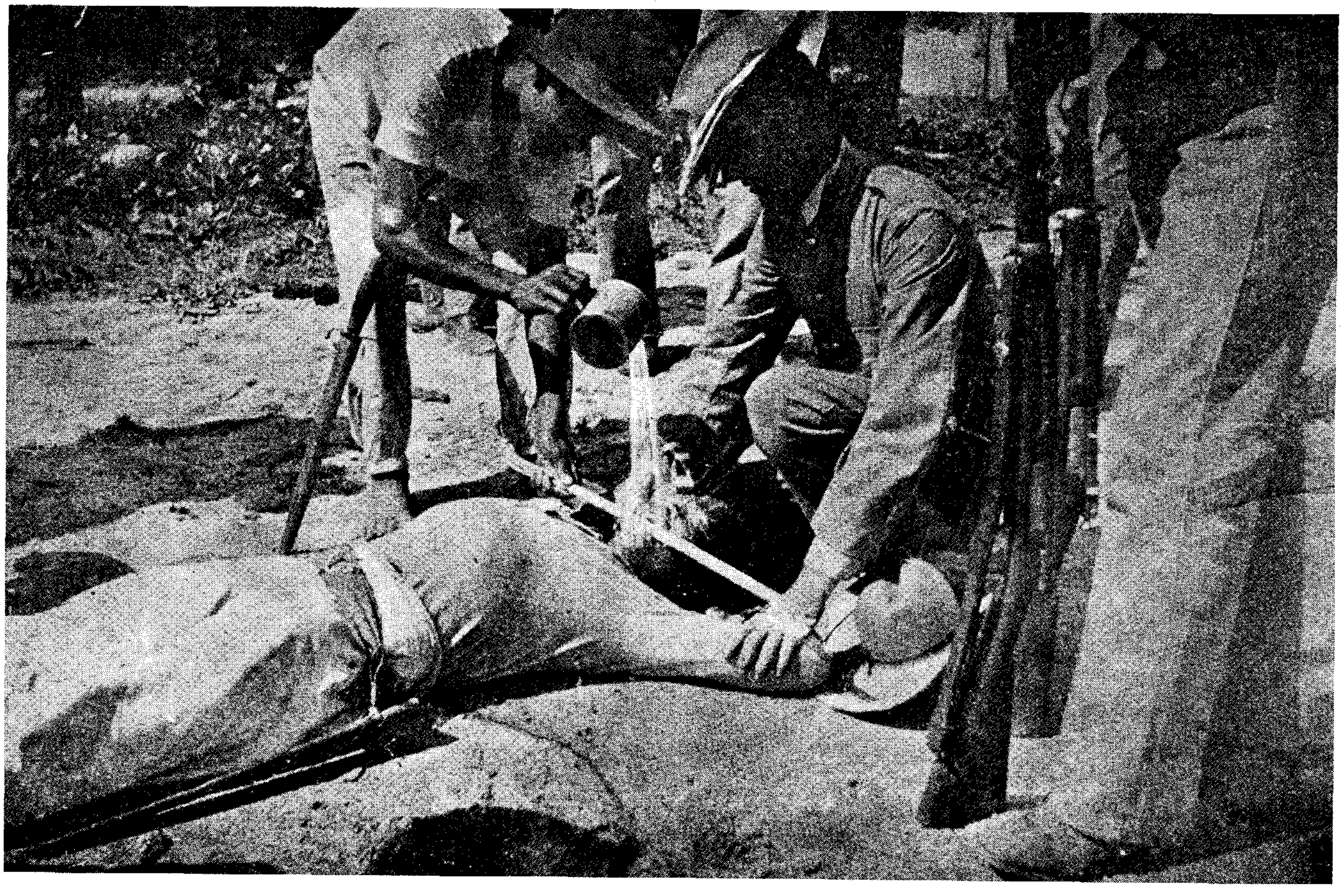
tiwar activist, one suspects—forwarded these clippings to centers of anti-imperialist publishing in the Northeast. But the war's critics were at first hesitant to do much with them: they were hard to substantiate, and they would, it was felt, subject the publishers to charges of anti-Americanism. This was especially true as the politics of imperialism became entangled in the 1900 Presidential campaign. As the Democratic candidate, William Jennings Bryan, clashed with the Republican incumbent over imperialism, which the Democrats called "the paramount issue," critics of the war had to defend themselves against accusations of having treasonously inspired the insurgency, prolonged the conflict, and betrayed American soldiers. But, after McKinley won a second term, the critics may have felt that they had little to lose.

Ultimately, outraged dissenters—chief among them the relentless Philadelphia-based reformer Herbert Welsh—forced the question of U.S. atrocities into the light. Welsh, who was descended from a wealthy merchant family, might have seemed an unlikely investigator of military abuse at the edge of empire. His main antagonists had previously been Philadelphia's party bosses, whose sordid machinations were extensively reported in Welsh's earnest upstart weekly, *City and State*. Yet he had also been a founder of the "Indian rights" movement, which attempted to curtail white violence and fraud while pursuing Native American "civilization" through Christianity, U.S. citizenship, and individual land tenure. An expansive concern with bloodshed and corruption at the nation's periphery is perhaps what drew Welsh's imagination from the Dakotas to Southeast Asia. He had initially been skeptical of reports of misconduct by U.S. troops. But by late 1901, faced with what he considered "overwhelming" proof, Welsh emerged as a single-minded campaigner for the exposure and punishment of atrocities, running an idiosyncratic investigation out of his Philadelphia offices. As one who "professes to believe in the gospel of Christ," he declared, he felt obliged to condemn "the cruelties and barbarities which have been perpetrated under our flag in the Philippines." Only the vigorous pursuit of justice could restore "the credit of the American nation in the eyes of the civilized world." By early 1902, three assistants to Welsh were chasing down returning soldiers for their testimony, and Philippine "cruelties" began to crowd Philadelphia's party bosses from the pages of *City and State*.

At about the same time, Senator George Frisbie Hoar, of Massachusetts, an eloquent speaker and one of the few Republican opponents of the war, was persuaded by "letters in large numbers" from soldiers to call for a special investigation. He proposed the formation of an independent committee, but Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, another Massachusetts Republican, insisted that the hearings take place inside his own, majority-Republican Committee on the Philippines. The investigation began at the end of January, 1902, and, in the months that followed, two distinct visions of the hearings emerged. Hoar had hoped for a broad examination of the conduct of the war; Lodge, along with the Republican majority, wanted to keep the focus on the present, and was "not convinced" of the



A picture of a "water detail," reportedly taken in May, 1901, in Sual, the Philippines. "It is a terrible torture," one soldier wrote.

COURTESY O.S.U. RARE BOOKS AND MANUSCRIPTS LIBRARY need to delve into "some of the disputed questions of the past." For the next ten weeks, prominent military and civilian officials expounded on the progress of American arms, the illegitimacy of Aguinaldo's government, its victimization of Filipinos, and the population's incapacity for self-government and hunger for American tutelage.

Still, the subject of what was called, with a late-Victorian delicacy, "cruelties" by U.S. troops arose a few days into the hearings, at the outset of three weeks' testimony by William Howard Taft. A Republican judge from Ohio, Taft had been sent to the islands to head the Philippine Commission, the core of the still prospective "postwar" government. He was speaking about the Federal Party, an élite body of collaborating Filipinos who were aiding "pacification," when Senator Thomas Patterson, a Democrat from Colorado, abruptly inquired about "the use of the so-called water cure in securing the surrender of guns." Taft replied that he "had intended to speak of the charges of torture which were made from time to time." He then allowed himself to be redirected by the young Indiana senator Albert Beveridge, an ardent imperialist who wanted to discuss the deportation of Filipino "irreconcilables" to Guam. But antiwar senators proved persistent. Minutes later, Senator Charles A. Culberson, a Democrat from Texas, pushed again. This time, Taft conceded:

> That cruelties have been inflicted; that people have been shot when they ought not to have been; that there have been in individual instances of water cure, that torture which I believe involves pouring water down the throat so that the man swells and gets the impression that he is going to be suffocated and then tells what he knows, which was a frequent treatment under the Spaniards, I am told—all these things are true.

Taft then immediately tried to contain the moral and political implications of the admission. Military officers had repeatedly issued statements condemning "such methods," he claimed, backing up their warnings with investigations and courts-martial. He also pointed to "some rather amusing instances" in which, he maintained, Filipinos had invited torture. Eager to share intelligence with the Americans, but needing a plausible cover, these Filipinos, in Taft's recounting, had presented themselves and "said they would not say anything until they were tortured." In many cases, it appeared, American forces had been only too happy to oblige them.

Less than two weeks later, on February 17, 1902, the Administration delivered to the Lodge committee a fervent response that was tonally at odds with Taft's jocular testimony. Submitted by Secretary of War Elihu Root, the report proclaimed that "charges in the public press of cruelty and oppression exercised by our soldiers towards natives of the Philippines" had been either "unfounded or grossly exaggerated." The document, entitled "Charges of Cruelty, Etc., to the Natives of the Philippines," was an unsubtle exercise in the politics of proportion. A meagre forty-four pages related to allegations of torture and abuse of Filipinos by U.S. soldiers; almost four hundred pages were devoted to records of military tribunals convened to try Filipinos for "cruelties" against their countrymen. If the committee sought atrocities, Root suggested, it need look no further than the Filipino insurgency, which had been "conducted with the barbarous cruelty common among uncivilized races." The relatively slender ledger of courts-martial was not, for Root, evidence of the unevenness of U.S. military justice on the islands. Rather, it showed that the American campaign had been carried out "with scrupulous regard for the rules of civilized warfare, with careful and genuine consideration for the prisoner and the noncombatant, with self-restraint, and with humanity never surpassed, if ever equaled, in any conflict, worthy only of praise, and reflecting credit on the American people."

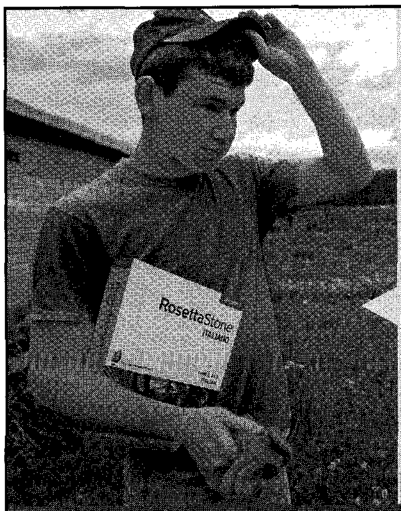
The scale of abuses in the Philippines remains unknowable, but, as early as March, rhetoric like Root's was being undercut by further revelations from the islands. When Major Littleton Waller, of the Marines, appeared before a court-martial in Manila that month, unprecedented public attention fell on the brutal extremities of U.S. combat, specifically on the island of Samar in late 1901. In the wake of a surprise attack by Filipino revolutionaries on American troops in the town of Balangiga, which had killed forty-eight of seventy-four members of an American Army company, Waller and his forces were deployed on a search-and-destroy mission across the island. During an ill-fated march into the island's uncharted interior, Waller had become lost, feverish, and paranoid. Believing that Filipino guides and carriers in the service of his marines were guilty of treachery, he ordered eleven of them summarily shot. During his court-martial, Waller testified that he had been under orders from the volatile, aging Brigadier General Jacob Smith ("Hell-Roaring Jake," to his comrades) to transform the island into a "howling wilderness," to "kill and burn" to the greatest degree possible—"The more you kill and burn, the better it will please me"—and to shoot anyone "capable of bearing arms." According to Waller, when he asked Smith what this last stipulation meant in practical terms, Smith had clarified that he thought that ten-year-old Filipino boys were capable of bearing arms. (In light of those orders, Waller was acquitted.)

The disclosures stirred indignation in the United States but also prompted rousing defenses. Smith was court-martialled that spring, and was found guilty of "conduct to the prejudice of good order and military discipline." Yet the penalty was slight: he was simply reprimanded and made to retire early. Root then used the opportunity to tout the restraint that the U.S. forces had shown, given their "desperate struggle" against "a cruel and savage foe." The Lodge committee, meanwhile, maintained its equanimity, with a steady procession of generals and officials recounting the success and benevolence of American operations.

That is what, on April 14th, made the testimony of Charles S. Riley, a clerk at a Massachusetts plumbing-and-steam-fitting company, so explosive. A letter from Riley had been published in the Northampton *Daily Herald* in March of the previous year, describing the water-cure torture of Tobeniano Ealdama, the *presidente* of the town of Igbaras, where Riley, then a sergeant in the 26th Volunteer Infantry, had been stationed. Herbert Welsh had learned of Riley, and enlisted him, among other soldiers, to testify before the committee. Amid the bullying questions of pro-war senators, Riley's account of the events of November 27, 1900, unfolded, and it was startlingly at odds with most official accounts. Upon entering the town's convent, which had been seized as a headquarters, Riley had witnessed Ealdama being bound and forced full of water, while supervised by a contract surgeon and Captain Edwin Glenn, a judge advocate. Ealdama's throat had been "held so he could not prevent swallowing the water, so that he had to allow the water to run into his stomach"; the water was then "forced out of him by pressing a foot on his stomach or else with [the soldiers'] hands." The ostensible goal of the water cure was to obtain intelligence: after a second round of torture, carried out in front of the convent by a "water detail" of five or six men, Ealdama confessed to serving as a captain in the insurgency. He then led U.S. forces into the bush in search of insurgents. After their return to Igbaras, that night, Glenn had ordered that the town, consisting of between four and five hundred houses, be burned to the ground, as Riley explained, "on account of the condition of affairs exposed by the treatment."

Riley's testimony, which was confirmed by another member of the unit, was inconvenient, especially coming after official declarations about America's "civilized" warfare. The next day, Secretary of War Root directed that a court-martial be held in San Francisco and cabled the general in charge of the Philippines to transport to the West Coast Glenn and any witnesses who could be located. "The President desires to know in the fullest and most circumstantial manner all the facts, nothing concealed and no man being for any reason favored or shielded," Root declared. Yet in the cable Root assured the general, well in advance of the facts, that "the violations of law and humanity, of which these cases, if true, are examples, will prove to be few and occasional, and not to characterize the conduct of the army generally in the Philippines." Most significant, though, was the decision, possibly at Glenn's request, to shift the location of the court-martial from San Francisco to Catbalogan, in the Philippines, close to sympathetic officers fighting a war, and an ocean away from the accusing witnesses, whose units had returned home. Glenn had objected to a trial in America because, he said, there was a "high state of excitement in the United States upon the subject of the so-called water cure and the consequent misunderstanding of what was meant by that term."

The trial lasted a week. When Ealdama testified about his experience—"My stomach and throat pained me, and also the nose where they passed the salt water through"—Glenn interrupted, trying to minimize the man's suffering by claiming (incorrectly) that



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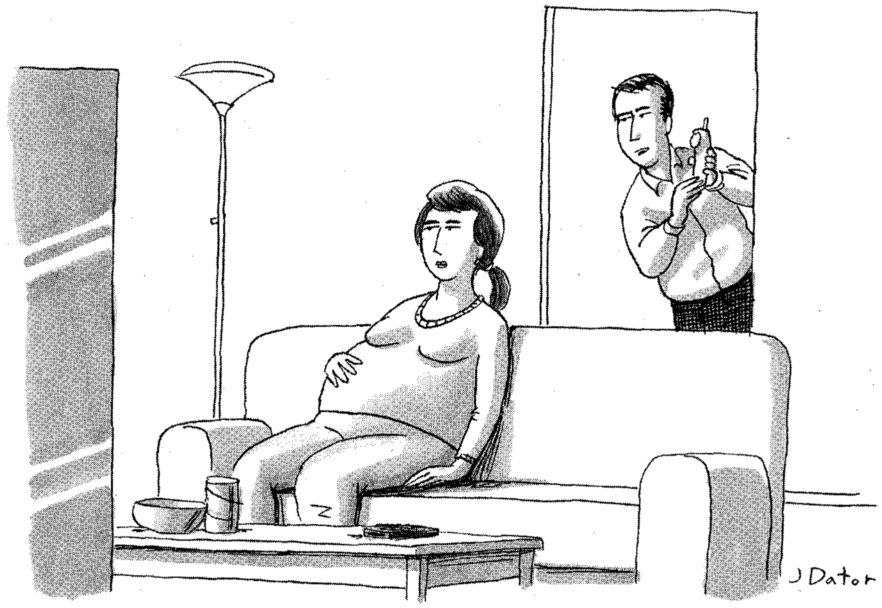

"Honey, it's the ob-gyn. Do we want to know if it's mine or not?"

• •

Ealdama had stated that he had experienced pain only "as [the water] passed through." Glenn defended his innocence by defending the water cure itself. He maintained that the torture of Ealdama was "a legitimate exercise of force under the laws of war," being "justified by military necessity." In making this case, Glenn shifted the focus to the enemy's tactics. He emphasized the treachery of Ealdama, who had been tried and convicted by a military commission a year earlier as a "war traitor," for aiding the insurgency. Testimony was presented by U.S. military officers and Filipinos concerning the insurgency's guerrilla tactics, which violated the norms of "civilized war." Found guilty, Glenn was sentenced to a one-month suspension and a fifty-dollar fine. "The court is thus lenient," the sentence read, "on account of the circumstances as shown in evidence." (Glenn retired from the Army, in 1919, as a brigadier general.) Meanwhile, Ealdama, twice tortured by Glenn's forces, was serving a sentence of ten years' hard labor; he had been temporarily released to enable him to testify against his torturer.

The vote of the court-martial at Catbalogan had been unanimous, but at least one prominent dissenter within the Army registered his disapproval. Judge Advocate General George B. Davis, forwarding the trial records to Root, wrote an introductory memorandum that seethed with indignation. Glenn's sentence, in his view, was "inadequate to the offense established by the testimony of the witnesses and the admission of the accused." Paragraph 16 of the General Orders, No. 100, the Army's Civil War-era combat regulations, could not have been clearer: "Military necessity does not admit of cruelty—that is, the infliction of suffering for the sake of suffering or for revenge, nor of maiming or wounding except in fight, nor of torture to extort confessions." Davis conceded that, in a "rare or isolated case," force might legitimately be used in "obtaining the unwilling service" of a guide, if justified as a "measure of emergency." But a careful examination of the events preceding the tortures at Igbaras revealed that "no such case existed." Furthermore, Glenn had described the water cure as "the habitual method of obtaining information from individual insurgents"—in other words, as "a method of conducting operations." But the operational use of torture, Davis stressed, was strictly forbidden. Regarding a subsequent water-cure court-martial, he wrote, "No modern state, which is a party to international law, can sanction, either expressly or by a silence which imports consent, a resort to torture with a view to obtain confessions, as an incident to its military operations." Otherwise, he inquired, "where is the line to be drawn?" And he rehearsed an unsettling, judicial calibration of pain:

> Shall the victim be suspended, head down, over the smoke of a smouldering fire; shall he be tightly bound and dropped from a distance of several feet; shall he be beaten with rods; shall his shins be rubbed with a broomstick until they bleed?

The questions were so vile and absurd—they were the kind that the Filipinos' Spanish tormentors had once asked—that it seemed "hardly necessary to pursue the subject further." The United States, he concluded, "can not afford to sanction the addition of torture to the several forms of force which may be legitimately employed in war." Glenn's sentence, however, stood. This would be perhaps the most intensive effort by the War Department to punish those who practiced the water cure in the Philippines.

Confronted with the facts provided by the Waller, Smith, and Glenn courts-martial, and with the testimony of a dozen more soldier witnesses who had followed Riley, Administration officials, military officers, and pro-war journalists launched a vigorous campaign in defense of the Army and the war. Their arguments were passionate and wide-ranging, and sometimes contradictory. Some simply attacked the war's critics, those who sought political advantage by crying out that "our soldiers are barbarous savages," as one major general put it. Some contended that atrocities were the exclusive province of the Macabebe Scouts, collaborationist Filipino troops over whom, it was alleged, U.S. officers had little control. Some denied, on racial grounds, that Filipinos were owed the "protective" limits of "civilized warfare." When, during the committee hearings, Senator Joseph Rawlins had asked General Robert Hughes whether the burning of Filipino homes by advancing U.S. troops was "within the ordinary rules of civilized warfare," Hughes had replied succinctly, "These people are not civilized." More generally, some people, while conceding that American soldiers had engaged in "cruelties," insisted that the behavior reflected the barbaric sensibilities of the Filipinos. "I think I know why these things have happened," Lodge offered in a Senate speech in May. They had "grown out of the conditions of warfare, of the war that was waged by the Filipinos themselves, a semicivilized people, with all the tendencies and characteristics of Asiatics, with the Asiatic indifference to life, with the Asiatic treachery and the Asiatic cruelty, all tinctured and increased by three hundred years of subjection to Spain." As the military physician Henry Rowland later phrased it, the American soldiers' "lust of slaughter" was "reflected from the faces of those around them."

In his private and public considerations of the question of "cruelties," Theodore Roosevelt—who had been President since McKinley's assassination, in September of 1901—lurched from intolerance for torture to attempts to rationalize it and outrage at the antiwar activists who made it a public issue. Writing to a friend, he admitted that, faced with a "very treacherous" enemy, "not a few of the officers, especially those of the native scouts, and not a few of the enlisted men, began to use the old Filipino method of mild torture, the water cure." Roosevelt was convinced that "nobody was seriously damaged," whereas "the Filipinos had inflicted incredible tortures upon our own people." Still, he wrote, "torture is not a thing that we can tolerate." In a May, 1902, Memorial Day address before assembled veterans at Arlington National Cemetery, Roosevelt deplored the "wholly exceptional" atrocities by American troops: "Determined and unswerving effort must be made, and has been and is being made, to find out every instance of barbarity on the part of our troops, to punish those guilty of it, and to take, if possible, even stronger measures than have already been taken to minimize or prevent the occurrence of all such acts in the future." But he deplored the nation's betrayal by anti-imperialist critics "who traduce our armies in the Philippines." In conquering the Philippines, he claimed, the United States was, in fact, dissolving "cruelty" in the form of Aguinaldo's regime. "Our armies do more than bring peace, do more than bring order," he said. "They bring freedom." Such wars were as historically necessary as they were difficult to contain: "The warfare that has extended the boundaries of civilization at the expense of barbarism and savagery has been for centuries one of the most potent factors in the progress of humanity. Yet from its very nature it has always and everywhere been liable to dark abuses."

There was, of course, an easier way than argument to end the debate. On July 4, 1902 (as if on cue from John Philip Sousa), Roosevelt declared victory in the Philippines. Remaining insurgents would be politically downgraded to "brigands." Although the United States ruled over the Philippines for the next four decades, the violence was now, in some sense, a problem in someone else's country. Activists in the United States continued to pursue witnesses and urge renewed Senate investigation, but with little success; in February, 1903, Lodge's Republican-controlled committee voted to end its inquiry into the allegations of torture. The public became inured to what had, only months earlier, been alarming revelations. As early as April 16, 1902, the New York *World* described the "American Public" sitting down to eat its breakfast with a newspaper full of Philippine atrocities:

> It sips its coffee and reads of its soldiers administering the "water cure" to rebels; of how water with handfuls of salt thrown in to make it more efficacious, is forced down the throats of the patients until their bodies become distended to the point of bursting; of how our soldiers then jump on the distended bodies to force the water out quickly so that the "treatment" can begin all over again. The American Public takes another sip of its coffee and remarks, "How very unpleasant!"

"But where is that vast national outburst of astounded horror which an old-fashioned America would have predicted at the reading of such news?" the *World* asked. "Is it lost somewhere in the 8,000 miles that divide us from the scenes of these abominations? Is it led astray by the darker skins of the alien race among which these abominations are perpetrated? Or is it rotted away by that inevitable demoralization which the wrongdoing of a great nation must inflict on the consciences of the least of its citizens?"

Responding to the verdict in the Glenn court-martial, Judge Advocate General Davis had suggested that the question it implicitly posed—how much was global power worth in other people's pain?—was one no moral nation could legitimately ask. As the investigation of the water cure ended and the memory of faraway torture faded, Americans answered it with their silence. ♦

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A REPORTER AT LARGE

BIG FOOT

In measuring carbon emissions, it's easy to confuse morality and science.

BY MICHAEL SPECTER

A little more than a year ago, Sir Terry Leahy, who is the chief executive of the Tesco chain of supermarkets, Britain's largest retailer, delivered a speech to a group called the Forum for the Future, about the implications of climate change. Leahy had never before addressed the issue in public, but his remarks left little doubt that he recognized the magnitude of the problem. "I am not a scientist," he said. "But I listen when the scientists say that, if we fail to mitigate climate change, the environmental, social, and economic consequences will be stark and severe. . . . There comes a moment when it is clear what you must do. I am determined that Tesco should be a leader in helping to create a low-carbon economy. In saying this, I do not underestimate the task. It is to take an economy where human comfort, activity, and growth are inextricably linked with emitting carbon and to transform it into one which can only thrive without depending on carbon. This is a monumental challenge. It requires a revolution in technology and a revolution in thinking. We are going to have to rethink the way we live and work."

Tesco sells nearly a quarter of the groceries bought in the United Kingdom, it possesses a growing share of the markets in Asia and Europe, and late last year the chain opened its first stores in America. Few corporations could have a more visible—or forceful—impact on the lives of their customers. In his speech, Leahy, who is fifty-two, laid out a series of measures that he hoped would ignite "a revolution in green consumption." He announced that Tesco would cut its energy use in half by 2010, drastically limit the number of products it transports by air, and place airplane symbols on the packaging of those which it does. More important, in an effort to help consumers understand the environmental impact of the choices they make every day, he told the forum that Tesco would develop a system of carbon labels and put them on each of its seventy thousand products. "Customers want us to develop ways to take complicated carbon calculations and present them simply," he said. "We will therefore begin the search for a universally accepted and commonly understood measure of the carbon footprint of every product we sell—looking at its complete life cycle, from production through distribution to consumption. It will enable us to label all our products so that customers can compare their carbon footprint as easily as they can currently compare their price or their nutritional profile."

Leahy's sincerity was evident, but so was his need to placate his customers. Studies have consistently demonstrated that, given a choice, people prefer to buy products that are environmentally benign. That choice, however, is almost never easy. "A carbon label will put the power in the hands of consumers to choose how they want to be green," Tom Delay, the head of the British government's Carbon Trust, said. "It will empower us all to make informed choices and in turn drive a market for low-carbon products." Tesco was not alone in telling people what it would do to address the collective burden of our greenhouse-gas emissions. Compelled by economic necessity as much as by ecological awareness, many corporations now seem to compete as vigorously to display their environmental credentials as they do to sell their products.

In Britain, Marks & Spencer has set a goal of recycling all its waste, and intends to become carbon-neutral by 2012—the equivalent, it claims, of taking a hundred thousand cars off the road every year. Kraft Foods recently began to power part of a New York plant with methane produced by adding bacteria to whey, a by-product of cream cheese. Not to be outdone, Sara Lee will deploy solar panels to run one of its bakeries, in New Mexico. Many airlines now sell "offsets," which offer passengers a way to invest in projects that reduce CO_2 emissions. In theory, that would compensate for the greenhouse gas caused by their flights. This year's Super Bowl was fuelled by wind turbines. There are carbon-neutral investment banks, carbon-neutral real-estate brokerages, carbon-neutral taxi fleets, and carbon-neutral dental practices. Detroit, arguably America's most vivid symbol of environmental excess, has also staked its claim. ("Our designers know green is the new black," Ford declares on its home page. General Motors makes available hundreds of green pictures, green stories, and green videos to anyone who wants them.)

Possessing an excessive carbon footprint is rapidly becoming the modern equivalent of wearing a scarlet letter. Because neither the goals nor acceptable emissions limits are clear, however, morality is often mistaken for science. A recent article in *New Scientist* suggested that the biggest problem arising from the epidemic of obesity is the additional carbon burden that fat people—who tend to eat a lot of meat and travel mostly in cars—place on the environment. Australia briefly debated imposing a carbon tax on families with more than two children; the environmental benefits of abortion have been discussed widely (and simplistically). Bishops of the Church of England have just launched a "carbon fast," suggesting that during Lent parishioners, rather than giving up chocolate, forgo carbon. (Britons generate an average of a little less than ten tons of carbon per person each year; in the United States, the number is about twice that.)

Greenhouse-gas emissions have risen rapidly in the past two centuries, and levels today are higher than at any time in at least the past six hundred and fifty thousand years. In 1995, each of the six billion people on earth was responsible, on average, for one ton of carbon emissions. Oceans and forests can absorb about half that amount. Although specific estimates

An excessive carbon footprint has become the equivalent of wearing a scarlet letter. Photograph by Horacio Salinas.

vary, scientists and policy officials increasingly agree that allowing emissions to continue at the current rate would induce dramatic changes in the global climate system. To avoid the most catastrophic effects of those changes, we will have to hold emissions steady in the next decade, then reduce them by at least sixty to eighty per cent by the middle of the century. (A delay of just ten years in stopping the increase would require double the reductions.) Yet, even if all carbon emissions stopped today, the earth would continue to warm for at least another century. Facts like these have transformed carbon dioxide into a strange but powerful new currency, difficult to evaluate yet impossible to ignore.

A person's carbon footprint is simply a measure of his contribution to global warming. (CO_2 is the best known of the gases that trap heat in the atmosphere, but others—including water vapor, methane, and nitrous oxide—also play a role.) Virtually every human activity—from watching television to buying a quart of milk—has some carbon cost associated with it. We all consume electricity generated by burning fossil fuels; most people rely on petroleum for transportation and heat. Emissions from those activities are not hard to quantify. Watching a plasma television for three hours every day contributes two hundred and fifty kilograms of carbon to the atmosphere each year; an LCD television is responsible for less than half that number. Yet the calculations required to assess the full environmental impact of how we live can be dazzlingly complex. To sum them up on a label will not be easy. Should the carbon label on a jar of peanut butter include the emissions caused by the fertilizer, calcium, and potassium applied to the original crop of peanuts? What about the energy used to boil the peanuts once they have been harvested, or to mold the jar and print the labels? Seen this way, carbon costs multiply rapidly. A few months ago, scientists at the Stockholm Environment Institute reported that the carbon footprint of Christmas—including food, travel, lighting, and gifts—was six hundred and fifty kilograms per person. That is as much, they estimated, as the weight of "one thousand Christmas puddings" for every resident of England.

As a source of global warming, the food we eat—and how we eat it—is no more significant than the way we make clothes or travel or heat our homes and offices. It certainly doesn't compare to the impact made by tens of thousands of factories scattered throughout the world. Yet food carries enormous symbolic power, so the concept of "food miles"—the distance a product travels from the farm to your home—is often used as a kind of shorthand to talk about climate change in general. "We have to remember our goal: reduce emissions of greenhouse gases," John Murlis told me not long ago when we met in London. "That should be the world's biggest priority." Murlis is the chief scientific adviser to the Carbon Neutral Company, which helps corporations adopt policies to reduce their carbon footprint as well as those of the products they sell. He has also served as the director of strategy and chief scientist for Britain's Environment Agency. Murlis worries that in our collective rush to make choices that display personal virtue we may be losing sight of the larger problem. "Would a carbon label on every product help us?" he asked. "I wonder. You can feel very good about the organic potatoes you buy from a farm near your home, but half the emissions—and half the footprint—from those potatoes could come from the energy you use to cook them. If you leave the lid off, boil them at a high heat, and then mash your potatoes, from a carbon standpoint you might as well drive to McDonald's and spend your money buying an order of French fries."

One particularly gray morning last December, I visited a Tesco store on Warwick Way, in the Pimlico section of London. Several food companies have promised to label their products with the amount of carbon-dioxide emissions associated with making and transporting them. Last spring, Walkers crisps (potato chips) became the first of them to reach British stores, and they are still the only product on the shelves there with a carbon label. I walked over to the crisp aisle, where a young couple had just tossed three bags of Walkers Prawn Cocktail crisps into their shopping cart. The man was wearing fashionable jeans and sneakers without laces. His wife was toting a huge Armani Exchange bag on one arm and dragging their four-year-old daughter with the other. I asked if they paid attention to labels. "Of course," the man said, looking a bit insulted. He was aware that Walkers had placed a carbon label on the back of its crisp packages; he thought it was a good idea. He just wasn't sure what to make of the information.

Few people are. In order to develop the label for Walkers, researchers had to calculate the amount of energy required to plant seeds for the ingredients (sunflower oil and potatoes), as well as to make the fertilizers and pesticides used on those potatoes. Next, they factored in the energy required for diesel tractors to collect the potatoes, then the effects of chopping, cleaning, storing, and bagging them. The packaging and printing processes also emit carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, as does the petroleum used to deliver those crisps to stores. Finally, the research team assessed the impact of throwing the empty bags in the trash, collecting the garbage in a truck, driving to a landfill, and burying them. In the end, the researchers—from the Carbon Trust—found that seventy-five grams of greenhouse gases are expended in the production of every individual-size bag of potato chips.

"Crisps are easy," Murlis had told me. "They have only one important ingredient, and the potatoes are often harvested near the factory." We were sitting in a deserted hotel lounge in Central London, and Murlis stirred his tea slowly, then frowned. "Let's just assume every mother cares about the environment—what then?" he asked. "Should the carbon content matter more to her than the fat content or the calories in the products she buys?"

I put that question to the next shopper who walked by, Chantal Levi, a Frenchwoman who has lived in London for thirty-two years. I watched her grab a large bag of Doritos and then, shaking her head, return it to the shelf. "Too many carbohydrates," she said. "I try to watch that, but between the carbs and the fat and the protein it can get to be a bit complicated. I try to buy locally grown, organic food," she continued. "It tastes better, and it's far less harmful to the environment." I asked if she was willing to pay more for products that carried carbon labels. "Of course," she said. "I care about that. I don't want my food flown across the world when I can get it close to home. What a waste.”

It is a logical and widely held assumption that the ecological impacts of transporting food—particularly on airplanes over great distances—are far more significant than if that food were grown locally. There are countless books, articles, Web sites, and organizations that promote the idea. There is even a “100-Mile Diet,” which encourages participants to think about “local eating for global change.” Eating locally produced food has become such a phenomenon, in fact, that the word “locavore” was just named the 2007 word of the year by the New Oxford American Dictionary.

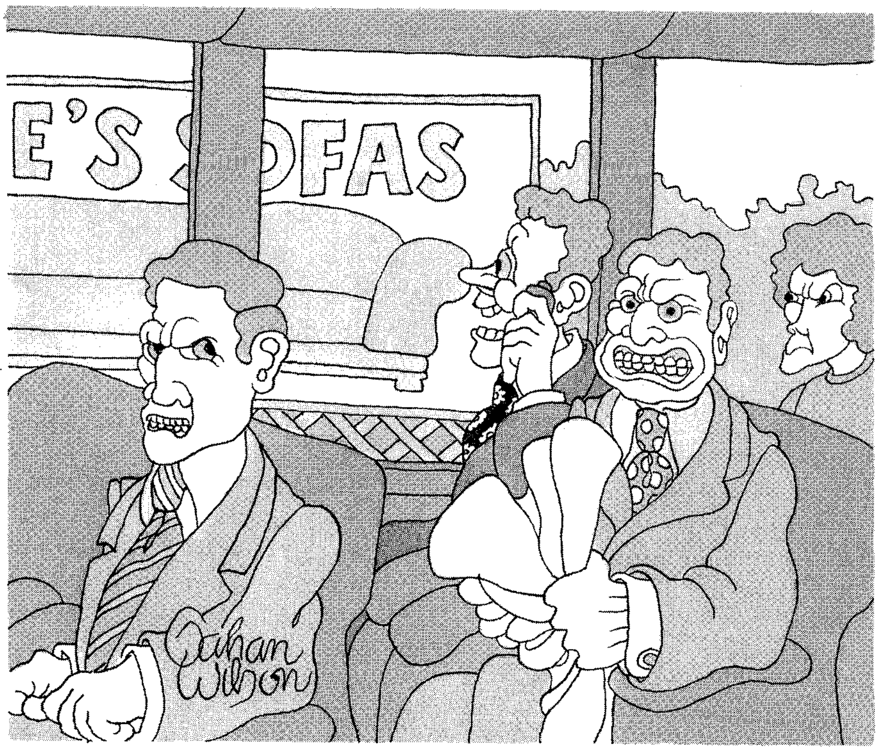
Paying attention to the emissions associated with what we eat makes obvious sense. It is certainly hard to justify importing bottled water from France, Finland, or Fiji to a place like New York, which has perhaps the cleanest tap water of any major American city. Yet, according to one recent study, factories throughout the world are burning eighteen million barrels of oil and consuming forty-one billion gallons of fresh water every day, solely to make bottled water that most people in the U.S. don’t need.

“Have a quick rifle through your cupboards and fridge and jot down a note of the countries of origin for each food product,” Mark Lynas wrote in his popular handbook “Carbon Counter,” published last year by HarperCollins. “The further the distance it has travelled, the bigger the carbon penalty. Each glass of orange juice, for example, contains the equivalent of two glasses of petrol once the transport costs are included. Worse still are highly perishable fresh foods that have been flown in from far away—green beans from Kenya or lettuce from the U.S. They may be worth several times their weight in jet fuel once the transport costs are factored in.”

Agricultural researchers at the University of Iowa have reported that the food miles attached to items that one buys in a grocery store are twenty-seven times higher than those for goods bought from local sources. American produce travels an average of nearly fifteen hundred miles before we eat it. Roughly forty per cent of our fruit comes from overseas and, even though broccoli is a vigorous plant grown throughout the country, the broccoli we buy in a supermarket is likely to have been shipped eighteen hundred miles in a refrigerated truck. Although there are vast herds of cattle in the U.S., we import ten per cent of our red meat, often from as far away as Australia or New Zealand.

In his speech last year, Sir Terry Leahy promised to limit to less than one per cent the products that Tesco imports by air. In the United States, many similar efforts are under way. Yet the relationship between food miles and their carbon footprint is not nearly as clear as it might seem. That is often true even when the environmental impact of shipping goods by air is taken into consideration. “People should stop talking about food miles,” Adrian Williams told me. “It’s a foolish concept: provincial, damaging, and simplistic.” Williams is an agricultural researcher in the Natural Resources Department of Cranfield University, in England. He has been commissioned by the British government to analyze the relative environmental impacts of a number of foods. “The idea that a product travels a certain distance and is therefore worse than one you raised nearby—well, it’s just idiotic,” he said. “It doesn’t take into consideration the land use, the type of transportation, the weather, or even the season. Potatoes you buy in winter, of course, have a far higher environmental ticket than if you were to buy them in August.” Williams pointed out that when people talk about global warming they usually speak only about carbon dioxide. Making milk or meat contributes less CO_2 to the atmosphere than building a house or making a washing machine. But the animals produce methane and nitrous oxide, and those are greenhouse gases, too. “This is not an equation like the number of calories or even the cost of a product,” he said. “There is no one number that works.”

Many factors influence the carbon footprint of a product: water use, cultivation and harvesting methods, quantity and type of fertilizer, even the type of fuel used to make the package. Sea-freight emissions are less than a sixtieth of those associated with airplanes, and you don’t have to build highways to berth a ship. Last year, a study of the carbon cost of the global wine trade found that it is actually more “green” for New Yorkers to drink wine from Bordeaux, which is shipped by sea, than wine from California, sent by truck. That is largely because shipping wine is mostly shipping glass. The study found that “the efficiencies of shipping drive a ‘green line’ all the way to Columbus, Ohio, the point where a wine



“Now we’re passing by a great big sign urging us to buy sofas!”

from Bordeaux and Napa has the same carbon intensity."

The environmental burden imposed by importing apples from New Zealand to Northern Europe or New York can be lower than if the apples were raised fifty miles away. "In New Zealand, they have more sunshine than in the U.K., which helps productivity," Williams explained. That means the yield of New Zealand apples far exceeds the yield of those grown in northern climates, so the energy required for farmers to grow the crop is correspondingly lower. It also helps that the electricity in New Zealand is mostly generated by renewable sources, none of which emit large amounts of CO_2. Researchers at Lincoln University, in Christchurch, found that lamb raised in New Zealand and shipped eleven thousand miles by boat to England produced six hundred and eighty-eight kilograms of carbon-dioxide emissions per ton, about a fourth the amount produced by British lamb. In part, that is because pastures in New Zealand need far less fertilizer than most grazing land in Britain (or in many parts of the United States). Similarly, importing beans from Uganda or Kenya—where the farms are small, tractor use is limited, and the fertilizer is almost always manure—tends to be more efficient than growing beans in Europe, with its reliance on energy-dependent irrigation systems.

Williams and his colleagues recently completed a study that examined the environmental costs of buying roses shipped to England from Holland and of those exported (and sent by air) from Kenya. In each case, the team made a complete life-cycle analysis of twelve thousand rose stems for sale in February—in which all the variables, from seeds to store, were taken into consideration. They even multiplied the CO_2 emissions for the air-freighted Kenyan roses by a factor of nearly three, to account for the increased effect of burning fuel at a high altitude. Nonetheless, the carbon footprint of the roses from Holland—which are almost always grown in a heated greenhouse—was six times the footprint of those shipped from Kenya. Even Williams was surprised by the magnitude of the difference. "Everyone always wants to make ethical choices about the food they eat and the things they buy," he told me. "And they should. It's just that what seems obvious often is not. And we need to make sure people understand that before they make decisions on how they ought to live."

How do we alter human behavior significantly enough to limit global warming? Personal choices, no matter how virtuous, cannot do enough. It will also take laws and money. For decades, American utilities built tall smokestacks, hoping to keep the pollutants they emitted away from people who lived nearby. As emissions are forced into the atmosphere, however, they react with water molecules and then are often blown great distances by prevailing winds, which in the United States tend to move from west to east. Those emissions—principally sulfur dioxide produced by coal-burning power plants—are the primary source of acid rain, and by the nineteen-seventies it had become clear that they were causing grave damage to the environment, and to the health of many Americans. Adirondack Park, in upstate New York, suffered more than anywhere else: hundreds of streams, ponds, and lakes there became so acidic that they could no longer support plant life or fish. Members of Congress tried repeatedly to introduce legislation to reduce sulfur-dioxide levels, but the Reagan Administration (as well as many elected officials, both Democratic and

THROWN

1.
She now carried out
both X,
which produced Y,
and Z,
which consumed it.

This seemed like completion.

So she broke herself
to bits,

but the sense
of having come full circle
could not be eliminated.

2.
Medicine Shoppe,
Tear-Drop R.V.

Don't get cute with me!

The mind wanders.

The material
concentrates.

The whole plain
yellow
with bunchgrasses

across which
some loose flocks
are thrown

—*Rae Armantrout*

Republican, from regions where sulfur-rich coal is mined) opposed any controls, fearing that they would harm the economy. When the cost of polluting is negligible, so are the incentives to reducing emissions.

"We had a complete disaster on our hands," Richard Sandor told me recently, when I met with him at his office at the Chicago Climate Exchange. Sandor, a dapper sixty-six-year-old man in a tan cable-knit cardigan and round, horn-rimmed glasses, is the exchange's chairman and C.E.O. In most respects, the exchange operates like any other market. Instead of pork-belly futures or gold, however, CCX members buy and sell the right to pollute. Each makes a voluntary (but legally binding) commitment to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases—including carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide—and hydrofluorocarbons. Four hundred corporations now belong to the exchange, including a growing percentage of America's largest manufacturers. The members agree to reduce their emissions by a certain amount every year, a system commonly known as cap and trade. A baseline target, or cap, is established, and companies whose emissions fall below that cap receive allowances, which they can sell (or save to use later). Companies whose emissions exceed the limit are essentially fined and forced to buy credits to compensate for their excess.

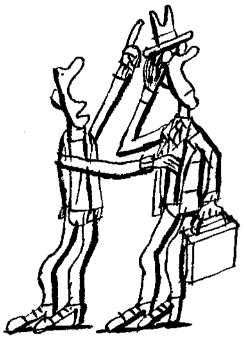
Sandor led me to the "trading floor," which, like most others these days, is a virtual market populated solely by computers. "John, can you get the carbon futures up on the big screen?" Sandor yelled to one of his colleagues. Suddenly, a string of blue numbers slid across the monitor. "There is our 2008 price," Sandor said. Somebody had just bid two dollars and fifteen cents per ton for carbon futures.

A former Berkeley economics professor and chief economist at the Chicago Board of Trade, Sandor is known as the "father of financial futures." In the nineteen-seventies, he devised a market in interest rates which, when they started to fluctuate, turned into an immense source of previously untapped wealth. His office is just north of the Board of Trade, where he served for two years as vice-chairman. The walls are filled with interest-rate arcana and mortgage memorabilia; his desk is surrounded by monitors that permit him to track everything from catastrophic-risk portfolios to the price of pollution.

Sandor invents markets to create value for investors where none existed before. He sees himself as "a guy from the sixties"—but one who believes that free markets can make inequality disappear. So, he wondered, why not offer people the right to buy and sell shares in the value of reduced emissions? "At first, people laughed when I suggested the whole future idea," he said. "They didn't see the point of hedging on something like interest rates, and when it came to pollution rights many people just thought it was wrong to take a business approach to environmental protection."

For Sandor, personal factors like food choices and driving habits are small facets of a far larger issue: making pollution so costly that our only rational choice is to stop. When he started, though, the idea behind a sulfur-dioxide-emissions market was radical. It also seemed distasteful; opponents argued that codifying the right to pollute would only remove the stigma from an unacceptable activity. You can't trade something unless you own it; to grant a company the right to trade in emissions is also to give it a property right over the atmosphere. (This effect was noted most prominently when the Reagan Administration deregulated airport landing rights, in 1986. Airlines that already owned the rights to land got to keep those rights, while others had to buy slots at auction; in many cases, that meant that the country's richest airlines were presented with gifts worth millions of dollars.)

Sandor acknowledges the potential for abuse, but he remains convinced that emissions will never fall unless there is a price tag attached to them. "You are really faced with a couple of possibilities when you want to control something," he told me. "You can say, 'Hey, we will allow you to use only *x* amount of these pollutants.' That is the command approach. Or you can make a market."



In the late nineteen-eighties, Sandor was asked by an Ohio public-interest group if he thought it would be possible to turn air into a commodity. He wrote an essay advocating the creation of an exchange for sulfur-dioxide emissions. The idea attracted a surprising number of environmentalists, because it called for large and specific reductions; conservatives who usually oppose regulation approved of the market-driven solution.

When Congress passed the Clean Air Act, in 1990, the law included a section that mandated annual acid-rain reductions of ten million tons below 1980 levels. Each large smokestack was fitted with a device to measure sulfur-dioxide emissions. As a way to help meet the goals, the act enabled the creation of the market. "Industry lobbyists said it would cost ten billion dollars in electricity increases a year. It cost one billion," Sandor told me. It soon became less expensive to reduce emissions than it was to pollute. Consequently, companies throughout the country suddenly discovered the value of investing millions of dollars in scrubbers, which capture and sequester sulfur dioxide before it can reach the atmosphere.

Sandor still enjoys describing his first sulfur trade. Representatives of a small Midwestern town were seeking a loan to build a scrubber. "They were prepared to borrow millions of dollars and leverage the city to do it," he told me. "We said, 'We have a better idea.' " Sandor arranged to have the scrubber installed with no initial cost, and the apparatus helped the city fall rapidly below its required emissions cap. He then calculated the price of thirty years' worth of that municipality's SO_2 emissions and helped arrange a loan for the town. "We gave it to them at a significantly lower rate than any bank would have done," Sandor said. "It was a fifty-million-dollar deal and they saved seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars a year—and never had to pay a balloon mortgage at the end. I mention this because trading that way not only allows you to comply with the law, but it provides creative financing tools to help structure the way investments are made. It encourages people to comply at lower costs, because then they will make money."

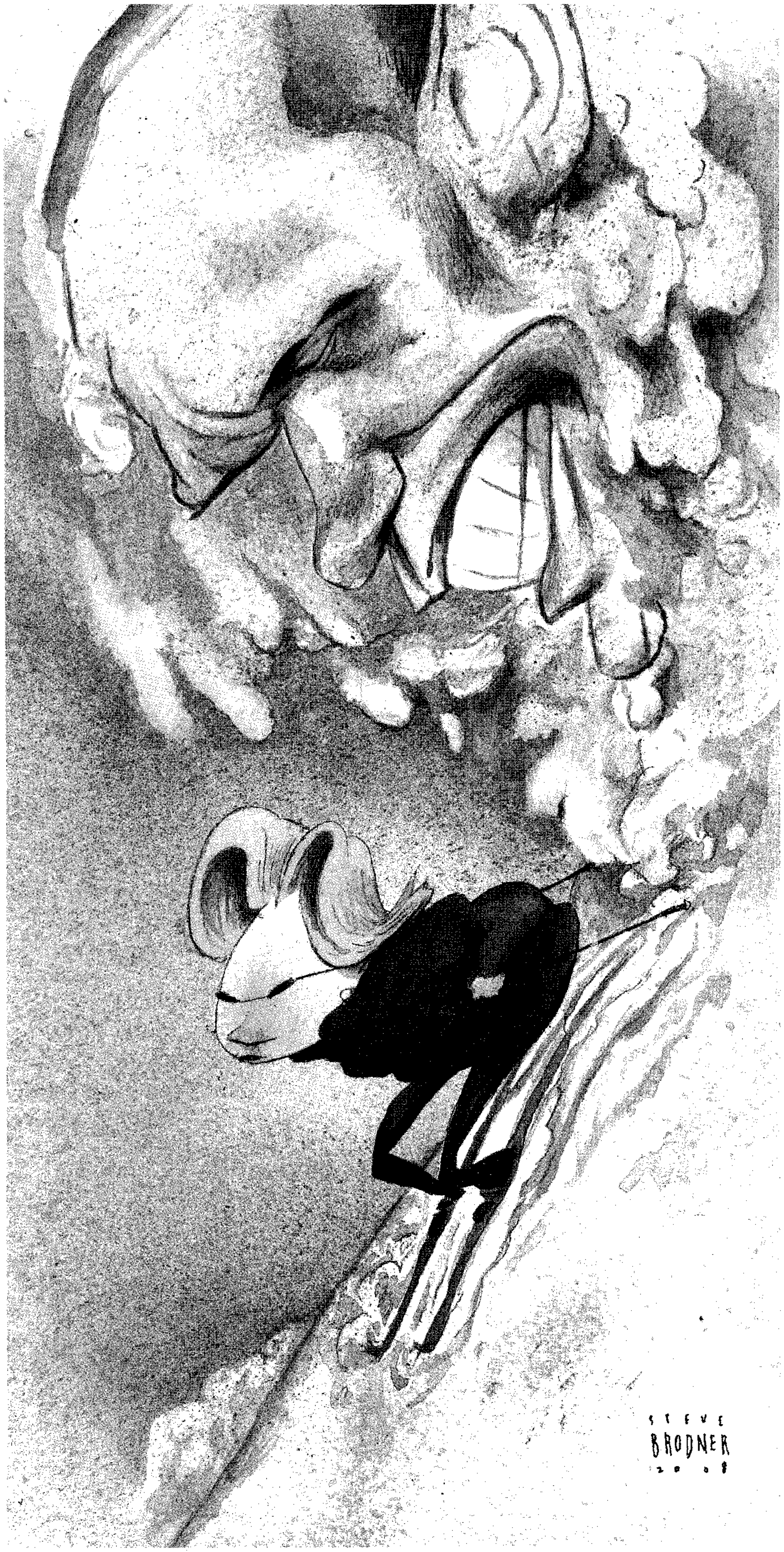
The program has been an undisputed success. Medical and environmental savings associated with reduced levels of lung disease and other conditions have been enormous—more than a hundred billion dollars a year, according to the E.P.A. "When is the last time you heard somebody even talking about acid rain?" Sandor asked. "It was going to ravage the world. Now it is not even mentioned in the popular press. We have reduced emissions from eighteen million tons to nine million, and we are going to halve it again by 2010. That is as good a social policy as you are ever likely to see."

No effort to control greenhouse-gas emissions or to lower the carbon footprint—of an individual, a nation, or even the planet—can succeed unless those emissions are priced properly. There are several ways to do that: they can be taxed heavily, like cigarettes, or regulated, which is the way many countries have established mileage-per-gallon standards for automobiles. Cap and trade is another major approach—although CO_2 emissions are a far more significant problem for the world than those which cause acid rain, and any genuine solution will have to be global.

Higher prices make conservation appealing—and help spark investment in clean technologies. When it costs money to use carbon, people begin to seek profits from selling fuel-efficient products like long-lasting light bulbs, appliances that save energy, hybrid cars, even factories powered by the sun. One need only look at the passage of the Clean Water Act, in 1972, to see that a strategy that combines legal limits with realistic pricing can succeed. Water had always essentially been free in America, and when something is free people don't value it. The act established penalties that made it expensive for factories to continue to pollute water. Industry responded at once, and today the United States (and much of the developed world) manufactures more products with less water than it did fifty years ago. Still, whether you buy a plane ticket, an overcoat, a Happy Meal, a bottle of wine imported from Argentina, or a gallon of gasoline, the value of the carbon used to make those products is not reflected by their prices.

In 2006, Sir Nicholas Stern, a former chief economist of the World Bank, who is now the head of Britain's Economic Service, issued a comprehensive analysis of the implications of global warming, in which he famously referred to climate change as "the greatest market failure the world has ever seen." Sir Nicholas suggested that the carbon emissions embed-

THE NAKED CAMPAIGN BY STEVE BRODNER



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ded in almost every product ought, if priced realistically, to cost about eighty dollars a ton.

Trading schemes have many opponents, some of whom suggest that attaching an acceptable price to carbon will open the door to a new form of colonialism. After all, since 1850, North America and Europe have accounted for seventy per cent of all greenhouse-gas emissions, a trend that is not improving. Stephen Pacala, the director of Princeton University's Environmental Institute, recently estimated that half of the world's carbon-dioxide emissions come from just seven hundred million people, about ten per cent of the population.

If prices were the same for everyone, however, rich countries could adapt more easily than countries in the developing world. "This market driven mechanism subjects the planet's atmosphere to the *legal* emission of greenhouse gases," the anthropologist Heidi Bachram has written. "The arrangement parcels up the atmosphere and establishes the routinized buying and selling of 'permits to pollute' as though they were like any other international commodity." She and others have concluded that such an approach would be a recipe for social injustice.

No one I spoke to for this story believes that climate change can be successfully addressed solely by creating a market. Most agreed that many approaches—legal, technological, and financial—will be necessary to lower our carbon emissions by at least sixty per cent over the next fifty years. "We will have to do it all and more," Simon Thomas told me. He is the chief executive officer of Trucost, a consulting firm that helps gauge the full burden of greenhouse-gas emissions and advises clients on how to address them. Thomas takes a utilitarian approach to the problem, attempting to convince corporations, pension funds, and other investors that the price of continuing to ignore the impact of greenhouse-gas emissions will soon greatly exceed the cost of reducing them.

Thomas thinks that people finally are beginning to get the message. Apple computers certainly has. Two years ago, Greenpeace began a "Green my Apple" campaign, attacking the company for its "iWaste." Then, last spring, not long before Apple launched the iPhone, Greenpeace issued a guide to electronics which ranked major corporations on their tracking, reporting, and reduction of toxic chemicals and electronic waste. Apple came in last. The group's findings were widely reported, and stockholders took notice. (A company that sells itself as one of America's most innovative brands cannot afford to ignore the environmental consequences of its manufacturing processes.) Within a month, Steve Jobs, the company's C.E.O., posted a letter on the Apple Web site promising a "greener Apple." He committed the company to ending the use of arsenic and mercury in monitors and said that the company would shift rapidly to more environmentally friendly LCD displays.

"The success of approaches such as ours relies on the idea that even if polluters are not paying properly now there is some reasonable prospect that they will have to pay in the future," Thomas told me. "If that is true, then we know the likely costs and they are of significant value. If polluters never have to pay, then our approach will fail.

"You have to make it happen, though," he went on. "And that is the job of government. It has to set a level playing field so that a market economy can deliver what it's capable of delivering." Thomas, a former investment banker, started Trucost nearly a decade ago. He mentioned the free-market economist Friedrich von Hayek, who won the Nobel Prize in Economics in 1974. "There is a remarkable essay in which he shows how an explosion, say, in a South American tin mine could work its way through the global supply chain to increase the price of canned goods in Europe," Thomas said. I wondered what the price of tin could have to do with the cost of global warming.

"It is very much to the point," Thomas answered. "Tin became more expensive and the market responded. In London, people bought fewer canned goods. The information travelled all the way from that mine across the world without any person in that supply chain even knowing the reasons for the increase. But there was less tin available and the market responded as you would have hoped it would." To Thomas, the message was simple: "If something is priced accurately, its value will soon be reflected in every area of the economy."

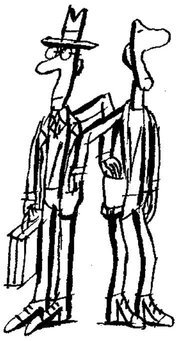
Without legislation, it is hard to imagine that a pricing plan could succeed. (The next Administration is far more likely to act than the Bush Administration has been. The best-known climate-change bill now before Congress, which would mandate capping carbon limits, was written by Senator Joseph Lieberman. Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, and John McCain are co-sponsors. Most industrial leaders, whatever their ideological reservations, would prefer a national scheme to a system of rules that vary from state to state.) Even at today's anemic rates, however, the market has begun to function. "We have a price of carbon that ranges from two to five dollars a ton," Sandor told me. "And everyone says that is too cheap. Of course, they are right. But it's not too cheap for people to make money.

"I got a call from a scientist a while ago"—Isaac Berzin, a researcher at M.I.T. "He said, 'Richard, I have a process where I can put an algae farm next to a power plant. I throw some algae in and it becomes a super photosynthesis machine and sucks the carbon dioxide out of the air like a sponge. Then I gather the algae, dry it out, and use it as renewable energy.'" Berzin asked Sandor whether, if he was able to take fifty million tons of carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere in this way, he could make a hundred million dollars.

"I said, 'Sure,' " Sandor recalled, laughing. "Two dollars a ton, why not? So he sends me a term paper. Not a prospectus, even." Sandor was skeptical, but it didn't take Berzin long to raise twenty million dollars from investors, and he is now working with the Arizona Public Service utility to turn the algae into fuel. Sandor shook his head. "This is at two dollars a ton," he said. "The lesson is important: price stimulates inventive activity. Even if you think the price is too low or ridiculous. Carbon has to be rationed, like water and clean air. But I absolutely promise that if you design a law and a trading scheme properly you are going to find everyone from professors at M.I.T. to the guys in Silicon Valley coming out of the woodwork. That is what we need, and we need it now."

In 1977, Jimmy Carter told the American people that they would have to balance the nation's demand for energy with its "rapidly shrinking resources" or the result "may be a national catastrophe." It was a problem, the President said, "that we will not solve in the next few years, and it is likely to get progressively worse through the rest of this century. We must not be selfish or timid if we hope to have a decent world for our children and grandchildren." Carter referred to the difficult effort as the "moral equivalent of war," a phrase that was widely ridiculed (along with Carter himself, who wore a cardigan while delivering his speech, to underscore the need to turn down the thermostat).

Carter was prescient. We are going to have to reduce our carbon footprint rapidly, and we can do that only by limiting the amount of fossil fuels released into the atmosphere. But what is the most effective—and least painful—way to achieve that goal? Each time we drive a car, use electricity generated by a coal-fired plant, or heat our homes with gas or oil, carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases escape into the air. We can use longer-lasting light bulbs, lower the thermostat (and the air-conditioning), drive less, and buy more fuel-efficient cars. That will help, and so will switching to cleaner sources of energy. Flying has also emerged as a major carbon don't—with some reason, since airplanes at high altitudes release at least ten times as many greenhouse gases per mile as trains do. Yet neither transportation—which accounts for fifteen per cent of greenhouse gases—nor industrial activity (another fifteen per cent) presents the most efficient way to shrink the carbon footprint of the globe.



Just two countries—Indonesia and Brazil—account for about ten per cent of the greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere. Neither possesses the type of heavy industry that can be found in the West, or for that matter in Russia or India. Still, only the United States and China are responsible for greater levels of emissions. That is because tropical forests in Indonesia and Brazil are disappearing with incredible speed. "It's really very simple," John O. Niles told me. Niles, the chief science and policy officer for the environmental group Carbon Conservation, argues that spending five billion dollars a year to prevent deforestation in countries like Indonesia would be one of the best investments the world could ever make. "The value of that land is seen as consisting only of the value of its lumber," he said. "A logging company comes along and offers to strip the forest to make some trivial wooden product, or a palm-oil plantation. The governments in these places have no cash. They are sitting on this resource that is doing nothing for their economy. So when a guy says, 'I will give you a few hundred dollars if you let me cut down these trees,' it's not easy to turn your nose up at that. Those are dollars people can spend on schools and hospitals."

The ecological impact of decisions like that are devastating. Decaying trees contribute greatly to increases in the levels of greenhouse gases. Plant life absorbs CO_2. But when forests disappear, the earth loses one of its two essential carbon sponges (the other is the ocean). The results are visible even from space. Satellite photographs taken over Indonesia and Brazil show thick plumes of smoke rising from the forest. According to the latest figures, deforestation pushes nearly six billion tons of CO_2 into the atmosphere every year. That amounts to thirty million acres—an area half the size of the United Kingdom—chopped down each year. Put another way, according to one recent calculation, during the next twenty-four hours the effect of losing forests in Brazil and Indonesia will be the same as if eight million people boarded airplanes at Heathrow Airport and flew en masse to New York.

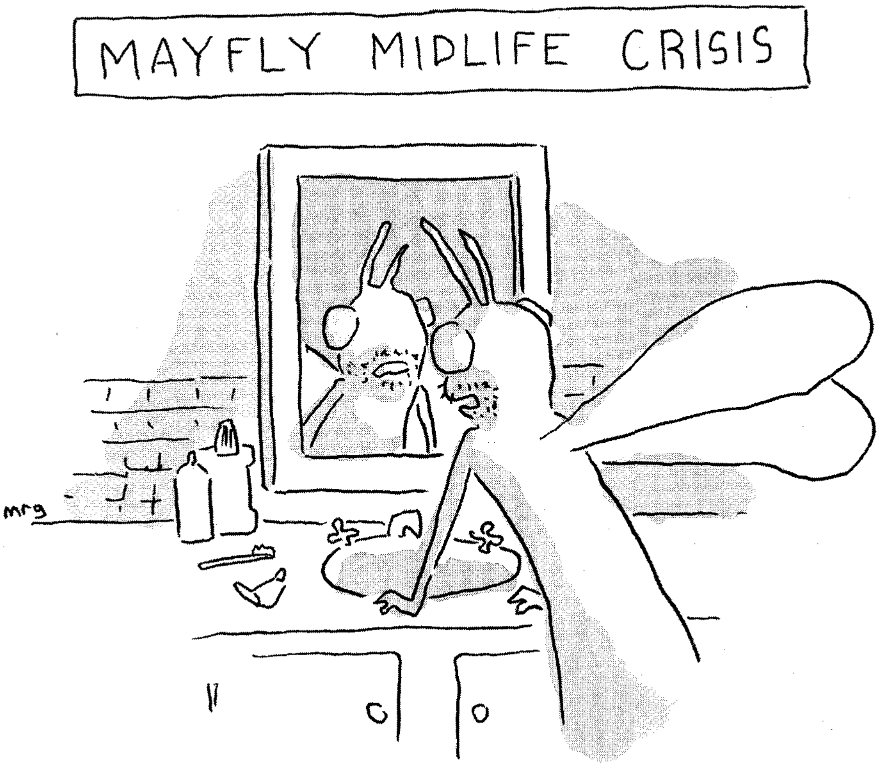
"This is the greatest remaining opportunity we have to help address global warming," Niles told me. "It's a no-brainer. People are paying money to go in and destroy those forests. We just have to pay more to prevent that from happening." Niles's group has proposed a trade: "If you save your forest and we can independently audit and verify it, we will calculate the emissions you have saved and pay you for that." The easiest way to finance such a plan, he is convinced, would be to use carbon-trading allowances. Anything that prevents carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere would have value that could be quantified and traded. Since undisturbed farmland has the same effect as not emitting carbon dioxide at all, people could create allowances by leaving their forests untouched or by planting new trees. (Rain forests are essential to planetary vitality in other ways, too, of course. More than a third of all terrestrial species live in forest canopies. Rising levels of CO_2 there alter the way that forests function, threatening to increase flooding and droughts and epidemics of plant disease. Elevated CO_2 in the forest atmosphere also reduces the quality of the wood in the trees, and that in turn has an impact on the reproduction of flowers, as well as that of birds, bees, and anything else that relies on that ecosystem.)

From both a political and an economic perspective, it would be easier and cheaper to reduce the rate of deforestation than to cut back significantly on air travel. It would also have a far greater impact on climate change and on social welfare in the developing world. Possessing rights to carbon would grant new power to farmers who, for the first time, would be paid to preserve their forests rather than destroy them. Unfortunately, such plans are seen by many people as morally unattractive. "The whole issue is tied up with the misconceived notion of 'carbon colonialism,'" Niles told me. "Some activists do not want the Third World to have to alter their behavior, because the problem was largely caused by us in the West."

Environmental organizations like Carbon Trade Watch say that reducing our carbon footprint will require restructuring our lives, and that before we in the West start urging the developing world to do that we ought to make some sacrifices; anything else would be the modern equivalent of the medieval practice of buying indulgences as a way of expiating one's sins. "You have to realize that, in the end, people are trying to buy their way out of bad behavior," Tony Juniper, the director of Friends of the Earth, told me. "Are we really a society that wants to pay rich people not to fly on private jets or countries not to cut down their trees? Is that what, ultimately, is morally right and equitable?"

Sandor dismisses the question. "Frankly, this debate just makes me want to scream," he told me. "The clock is moving. They are slashing and burning and cutting the forests of the world. It may be a quarter of global warming and we can get the rate to two per cent simply by inventing a preservation credit and making that forest have value in other ways. Who loses when we do that?

“People tell me, well, these are bad guys, and corporate guys who just want to buy the right to pollute are bad, too, and we should not be giving them incentives to stop. But we need to address the problems that exist, not drown in fear or lose ourselves in morality. Behavior changes when you offer incentives. If you want to punish people for being bad corporate citizens, you should go to your local church or synagogue and tell God to punish them. Because that is not our problem. Our problem is global warming, and my job is to reduce greenhouse gases at the lowest possible cost. I say solve the problem and deal with the bad guys somewhere else.”



“I’ve got a wife, kids, a career—Jesus! I’m twelve hours old! How did this happen to me?”

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The Tesco corporate headquarters are spread across two low-slung, featureless buildings in an unusually dismal part of Hertfordshire, about half an hour north of London. Having inspired many of the discussions about the meaning of our carbon footprint, the company has been criticized by those who question the emphasis on food. As Adrian Williams, the Cranfield agricultural researcher, put it, the company has been “a little bit shocked” by the discovery that its original goal, to label everything, was naïve.

The process has indeed been arduous. Tesco has undertaken a vast—and at times lonely—attempt to think about global warming in an entirely new way, and the company shows little sign of pulling back. “We are spending more than a hundred million pounds a year trying to increase our energy efficiency and reduce CO_2 emissions,” Katherine Symonds told me. A charismatic woman with an abiding belief that global warming can be addressed rationally, Symonds is the corporation’s climate-change manager. “We are trying to find a way to help consumers make choices they really want to make—choices that mean something to them. This is not all about food. We just happen to be in the food business.

“One of our real responsibilities is to say to our customers, ‘The most important thing you can do to effect climate change is insulate your house properly,’ ” she went on. “ ‘Next would be to get double-glazed windows,’ ” which prevent heat from escaping in the winter. “ ‘Third, everyone should get a new boiler.’ We are trying to put this into context, not to say, ‘Buy English potatoes.’” Consumers are unlikely to stop shopping. Economies won’t stand still, either; those of China and India are expanding so speedily that people often ask whether sacrifices anywhere else can even matter.

“We have to be careful not to rush from denial to despair,” John Elkington told me, when I visited him not long ago at his offices at SustainAbility, the London-based environmental consulting firm he helped found more than two decades ago. He believes there is a danger that people will feel engulfed by the challenge, and ultimately helpless to address it.

“We are in an era of creative destruction,” he said. A thin, easygoing man with the look of an Oxford don, Elkington has long been one of the most articulate of those who seek to marry economic prosperity with environmental protection. “What happens when you go into one of these periods is that before you get to the point of reconstruction things have to fall apart. Detroit will fall apart. I think Ford”—a company that Elkington has advised for years—“will fall apart. They have just made too many bets on the wrong things. A bunch of the institutions that we rely on currently will, to some degree, decompose. I believe that much of what we count as democratic politics today will fall apart, because we are simply not going to be able to deal with the scale of change that we are about to face. It will profoundly disable much of the current political class.”

He sat back and smiled softly. He didn’t look worried. “I wrote my first report on climate change in 1978, for Herman Kahn, at the Hudson Institute,” he explained. “He did not at all like what I was saying, and he told me, ‘The trouble with you environmentalists is that you see a problem coming and you slam your foot on the brakes and try and steer away from the chasm. The problem is that it often doesn’t work. Maybe the thing to do is jam your foot on the pedal and see if you can just jump across.’ At the time, I thought he was crazy, but as I get older I realize what he was talking about. The whole green movement in technology is in that space. It is an attempt to jump across the chasm.” ♦

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An audio interview with Michael Specter.

LIFE AND LETTERS

EAST SIDE STORY

How Louis Auchincloss came to terms with his world.

BY LARISSA MACFARQUHAR

It was November on Park Avenue, two in the afternoon, a little brisk, a little damp, the sky the color of gray stone. A car drew up at a building on the east side of the street to collect Louis Auchincloss for an appointment. Auchincloss—novelist, essayist, retired trusts-and-estates lawyer, nonagenarian—ventured carefully onto the sidewalk, his overcoat buttoned, cane in hand, hat in place. His agent, Mitchell Waters, who was to accompany him, opened the back door of the car, and Auchincloss, prudently grasping the top of the door, gradually installed himself. He was off to record an interview for Barnes & Noble about his œuvre—at least, the fiction part of it, the stories of striving and money and families and idealism and decline, set in the milieu in which he was reared, the Upper East Side and Wall Street (with summertime forays to Newport and Bar Harbor). Auchincloss doesn't usually bother with promotion these days; he published a book last year, but, since he has published sixty-four since 1947, this was not as interesting an event for him as it might be for the next man. One loves all one's children, but there are limits. He sat up very straight in the back seat, gripping his cane, unblinking, magnificent Auchincloss nose aloft.

"You haven't had any more luck with that Thackeray thing, have you?" he inquired of Waters, as the car drove westward through the Park. Auchincloss had written a monograph on Thackeray.

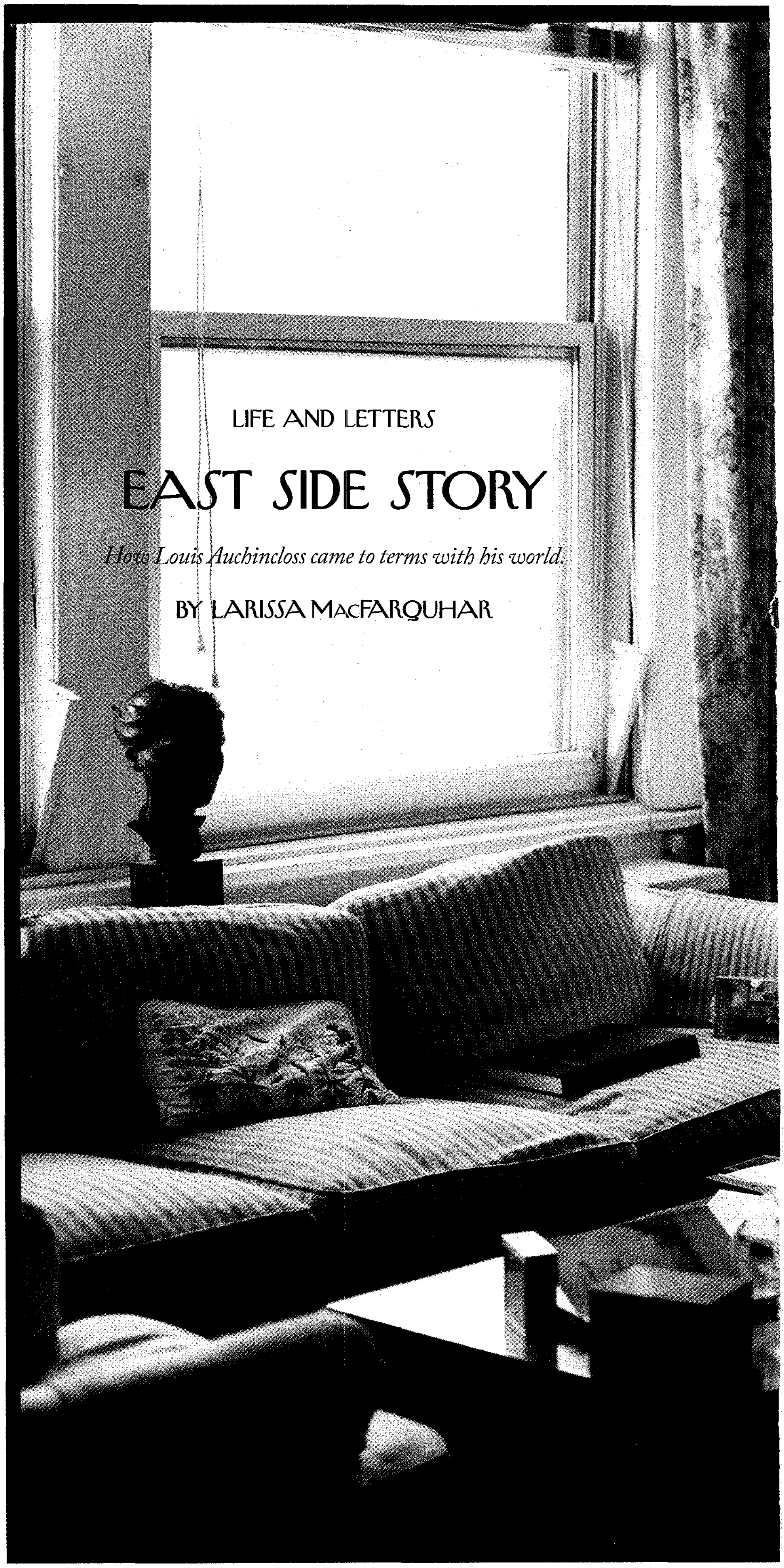
"No," Waters said apologetically, twisting to face him.

"I think you can give that up, don't you? You must have sent it everywhere."

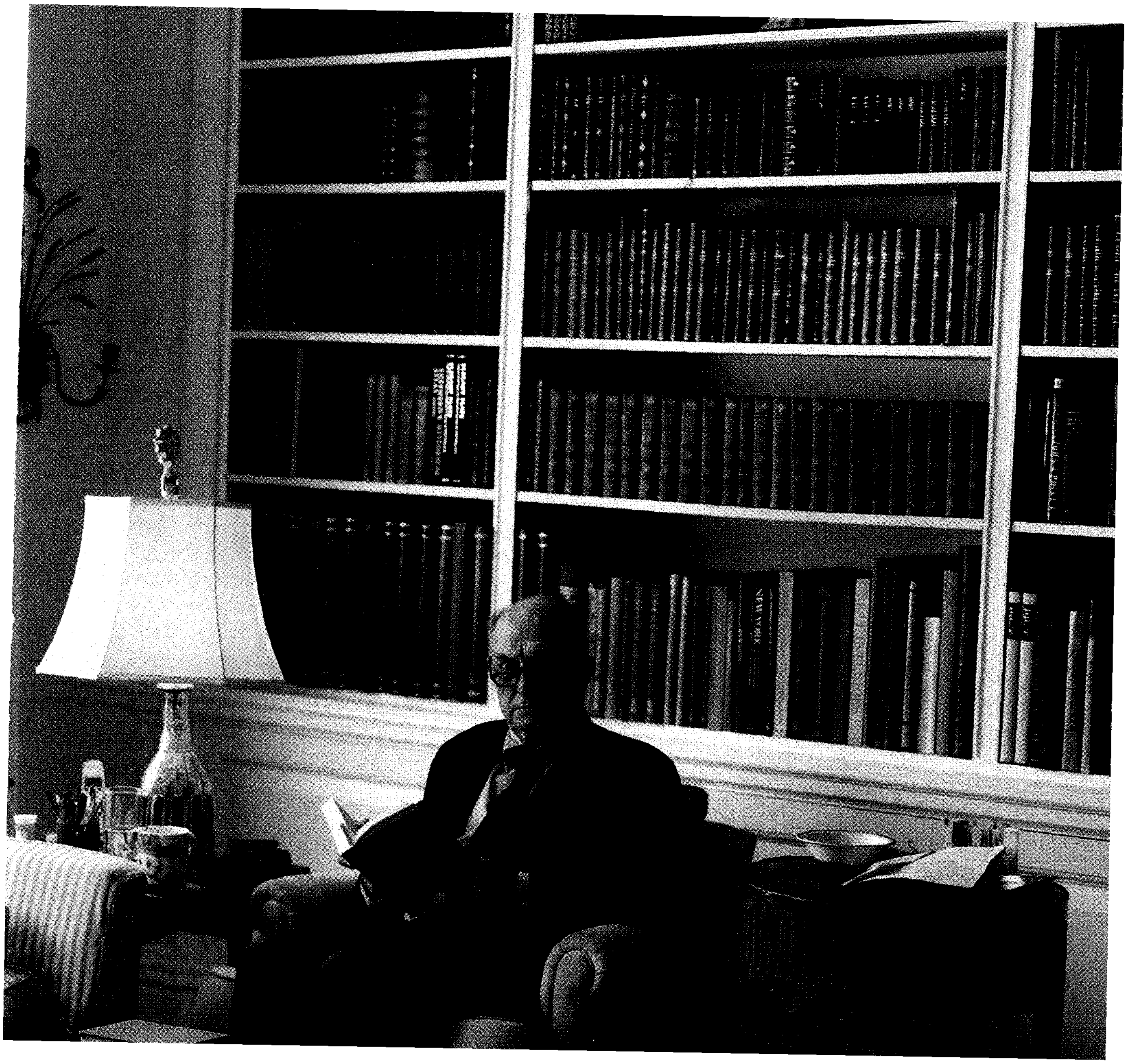
"I sent it to all the places I thought would do that kind of thing," Waters admitted.

"Oh, you've done more than you need, thank you for your efforts," Auchincloss said cheerfully. "Your predecessor, James Oliver Brown, said once that he was accused by a lady author of neglecting her work. He gave her a list of the publishers who had turned it down, and there were thirty-seven. And then she got mad at him again and said, 'You've disgraced me all over New York!' "

The car emerged from the Park and



Auchincloss in his Park Avenue home. He always felt that a secure life was his destiny—



threaded through side streets toward the Hudson.

"Welcome to my neighborhood, Louis," Waters said. "I guess West End Avenue is the Park Avenue of the West Side, huh?"

Auchincloss made no comment.

"I can remember when the West Side wasn't fashionable *at all*," he said after a minute. "I had a friend called Tommy Curtiss who lived on the West Side, and he used to come to school in a big red Rolls-Royce, which I envied. I remember Mother talking to Father about Tommy Curtiss's mother, and she said, 'Do you suppose there was ever a Mr. Curtiss?' Cold, insulting attitude about a respectable lady! West Side. Oh, well."

The car turned onto the West Side Highway and headed south along the river, passing the midtown piers. Auchincloss usually drove down the East Side, so he hadn't seen the piers in a long time.

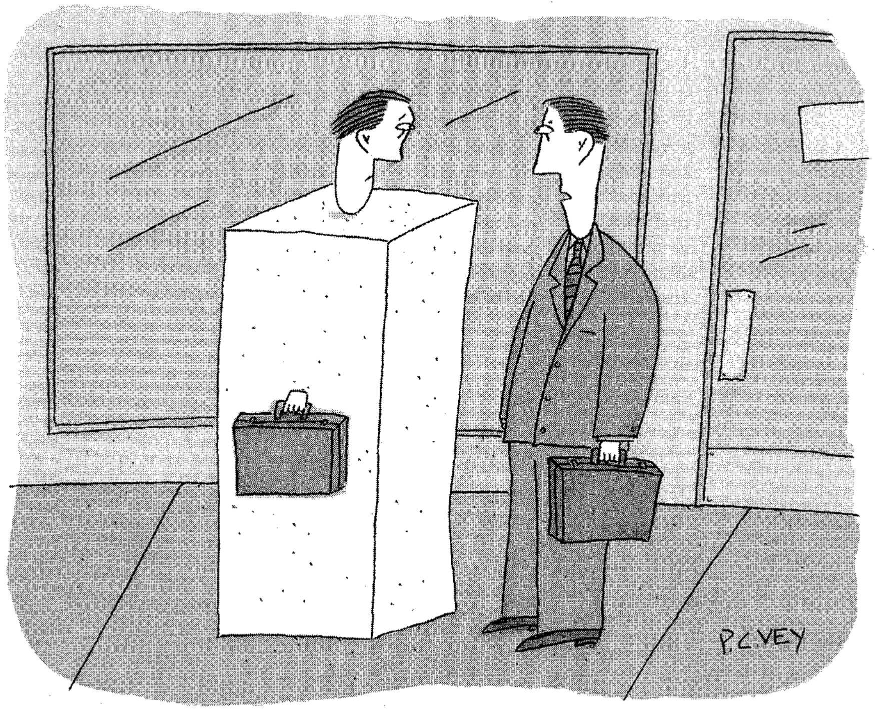
"As a boy, I used to come down here when we sailed for Europe," he said. "Great big liners. I'd be thrilled! Except my mother was always asking me to do something perfectly horrible. There was a heavy fog once, and Mother said, 'They're not blowing the foghorn enough—you go up to the bridge and tell the captain to blow the foghorn more.' As you can imagine, I wanted to go over the side, I was terrified. But you obeyed Mother. So I went up there and we were first class so they were nice to me, and the captain said, 'Well, hello, sonny, what do you want?' And I said, 'Mother says you ought to blow the foghorn.' 'Oh,' he says. 'I'll write a note to your mama,' and he wrote this note that sounded like a line from Corneille: '*Les marines français ne connaissent pas le brouillard*.' I took this down to Mother and she said, 'Well, he damn well ought to *connaître* the *brouillard!*' And I thought, Oh God, she's not going to send me back—I *will* go over the side. Fortunately, Father overheard and said, 'Priscilla, leave him alone.'"

Auchincloss gazed out the window at the ships.

"Father was the nicest man in the world," he said. "When I was delivering the centennial address at Groton School, one of the faculty said, 'Would you like to see the application that was made in 1929 when you came to the school at the age of twelve?' One of the questions was: What sports is Louis interested in? And my father, who was rather a jock himself, wrote, 'Louis isn't interested in any sports at all.' Poor Father. He never reproached me. And athletic fathers can be horrible to their children."

"Even today," Waters said.

"Oh, sure. Today worse than ever!"



"If you do business with people who encase people in concrete, you run the risk of being encased in concrete."

Auchincloss's father came from a family that had something of the presence in New York of the great old clans, although it wasn't clear why. There was never a fortune—each generation of Auchincloss men either made or married its own money. And the family had never produced a great man—no governor, no Supreme Court Justice, not so much as a minor mayor. No Auchincloss had signed the Declaration of Independence—they arrived too late for that, emigrating from Scotland only in 1803. No, the weight of the family had more to do with its unusually large number of male offspring, combined, naturally, with the tendency of those offspring to marry up. Auchinclosses spread like a mold. "For idle hypergamy and relentless fecundity there has not been a family like them since those much less attractive *Mittel-Europa* realtors, the Hapsburgs," Gore Vidal, a relative, observed in an essay.

Suffering, perhaps, from his family's lack of claim to aristocracy, Louis as a boy was extremely concerned with its material glamour. Fortunately for his youthful amour propre, his household was scarcely affected by the Depression: the family lived in a brownstone on East Ninety-first Street (where the externally operated elevator enabled Louis to keep trapped housemaids perpetually ascending and descending between floors), then moved to 1185 Park Avenue, before settling at 66 East Seventy-ninth Street. But he paid a great deal of attention to the sort of car a person drove, and tried to persuade his mother to get a job so that they could buy a Rolls-Royce or a Hispano-Suiza. "It became a rather sour family joke that I had inherited the characteristics of Mother's paternal grandmother, a comic legend in the family for the naïveté of her worldly values," he wrote in his memoir, "A Writer's Capital," published in 1974. "'Don't speak ill of Mrs. Kingsland,' she had told a grandchild; 'she has three million dollars.'" As late as his twenties, Auchincloss was a delightfully impenitent snob. "I feel my strong feeling for the house rested on grounds purely snobbish," he wrote to his mother in response to her announcement that she and his father were selling their country house.

"Even in 1945 I am low enough to care about you and Father having a 'place in Long Island' as well as a 'place in town.' Two such 'places' represent the bed rock of a certain trite life of materialism to which from the age of four I have so passionately and unsuccessfully tried to attach you. . . . I laughed feebly at your saying at the end of your account of the sale (which stabbed like 'The Cherry Orchard') that I was too remote to care about such trivia."

Auchincloss was very close to his formidable mother: it took him years to escape her. She did everything she could to try to talk him out of writing fiction. "She just thought I was not a very good writer," he says. "And she thought it would hurt my career, that people would laugh at me in the law. She meant well." She thought his first book was pretty bad, and campaigned against its publication so relentlessly that he ended up publishing it under a pseudonym. She told him that a chapter in another of his books was as dull as anything she'd ever read. (She eventually became reconciled to his writing, nearly twenty years into his career, after he published "The Embezzler," because she thought it good.) Even so, he gave her all his manuscripts and edited them according to her suggestions: he regarded her as a brilliant critic, and felt that she could have been a good novelist had she turned her mind to it. "Somebody, it might have been my tough old Aunt Elsa, detested by Aunt Priscilla, said that her three other children never emerged from her domination," Judge Louis Stanton, a cousin of Auchincloss's, says. "But Louis got free of her and therefore, of course, he was the one she loved best."

It was some time before Auchincloss gathered the resources to embark on a marriage of his own. In his thirties, he underwent an extensive regimen of psychoanalysis (paid for by his parents), and emerged with the conviction that a man's background was largely his own creation, and if he spent his life doing something he hated it was his own fault and nobody else was really going to care. It was time to shake off inherited inhibitions. "He felt there was a certain Waspy reluctance in his family to play the game, but in his view you should play your cards with vigor, every card you'd got," his son John says. "If one of your cards was that you were Louis Auchincloss's son, you should play that, though he would never have said that so brassily."

In 1957, just shy of his fortieth birthday, he married Adele Lawrence, who was descended from Burdens, Sloanes, and Vanderbilts, and, with the exception of detective novels and romances, had no interest in literature whatsoever. ("I am quite absurdly happy and pleased with myself," Auchincloss wrote to Gore Vidal shortly before the wedding. "Adele, who though the ablest of industrial designers and *practically* an M.A. in the history of art, is not shall-we-say exactly a specialist in the modern novel. Determined to bone up on this field she read a few pages of dear Norman's 'The N & the D,' but put it away in a sad fit of boredom. You will like her.") Once they were married, she read his books but never commented on them. She loved paintings, a taste that they shared (somewhat—asked what sort of art she was interested in, he says, "Oh, very good art"), and the outdoors, one that they didn't. Despite her ancestry, she had not much money of her own. During the engagement, her father took Auchincloss to lunch at the Yale Club and warned him that, with the Vanderbilts, the money had departed but the tastes had remained.

She and Auchincloss had three boys, two of whom, like their father, attended Groton, Yale, and law school at the University of Virginia. They lived on Park Avenue, bought a house in the country, went to charity balls, and generally lived a life rather similar to that of his parents. "Adele once said to me, 'I thought I was going to meet all these wonderful writers when I married you,'" Auchincloss says. "And I said, 'Who would you like to meet?' And she said, 'Well, what about Norman Mailer?' I said, 'You want to meet Norman Mailer? I have an invitation from him, a party in Brooklyn.' 'Oh, let's go,' she said. 'When is it?' 'It's Wednesday,' I said, 'and it starts at midnight.' She said, 'For Pete's sakes, I'm beddy-bye by then.' 'Well, don't ask to meet writers if you want to go beddy-bye,' I said. 'I want to go beddy-bye, too.'"

A life of early nights and settled repetition suited Auchincloss very nicely, and he has always been grateful that one was granted him. "I never had a serious disease," he says. "I lost my wife, which was a terrible blow, but that was after thirty-four years of marriage, which is more than most people get. I think in four years of war"—he served in the Navy—"I shaved every day." He has always felt that this sort of life was his destiny. He hardly worried about dying during the war, even when his ship was repeatedly shelled. He knew he wouldn't. "I had all my life a curious sense of immunity, that nothing would happen to me," he says. "And nothing ever did."

Auchincloss had both hips replaced last year, and for a few months in the summer he was more or less confined to his apartment—the same one that he has lived in since 1959, shortly after he was married. He turned ninety in September, but his birthday party (smallish, with the toasts restricted by him to one or two, because otherwise they go on and on and get unbelievably tedious) was postponed until he felt more able to get about. Now that he is permitted to walk again, he ventures out occasionally, to see a show at the Met or something like that, but mostly he stays in. He reads in an armchair by the window in his living room (in whose soft cushions he finds it all too easy to lose small things like pens and hearing-aid batteries, which really are ridiculously tiny). Sitting in the armchair, he faces a glass-covered bookcase of inlaid wood in which is displayed what remains (after relatives sold most of it) of a lovely set of orange-white-and-gold china ornamented with the crest of a Scottish baronet, which belonged to his wife's grandmother. Intermingled with the plates is a small collection of crimson leather-bound books stamped with the gold crest of the French royal family. ("Mostly dull religious tracts," he says, "but they go so well with the china.") Behind him, on bookshelves, alongside a leather-bound set of his own work and some family photograph albums, is an assortment of volumes that reflect his various interests—"Prominent Families of New York," "The Victorian Country House," "Elegant New York," "McKim, Mead, and White," "A History of French Architecture," "John Singer Sargent," "David," "Frederic Edwin Church," Jane Austen, Molière's "Oeuvres," "Elegant Plate: Three Centuries of Precious Metals in New York City," Volumes I and II. On the far side of the mantelpiece, more bookshelves hold a collection of first editions: a complete Henry James, complete Brontës, complete Proust, the memoirs of Saint-Simon. "I sold a lot of the best ones because Adele ran out of money, which she was apt to do," he says. "She was building a house in the country and I had to put a roof on it. I now regret it."

Across from the fireplace is the doorway to the dining room, in which a fine old table stands reduced, its leaves down. On the walls hang paintings and sketches of various ancestors, his wife's and his own. The Burden family, for instance, by Eastman Johnson: "They lost all their money because of the car—it ruined their horseshoe business—but they married Vanderbilts and recovered their fortune." A Helleu sketch of the famous beauty Consuelo Vanderbilt, his wife's grandmother's cousin, who was forced into marriage in 1895 with Charles Spencer-Churchill, the ninth Duke of Marlborough—"the greatest international marriage ever made, until the Duke of Windsor." Down the hall, in his study, he keeps less valuable first editions—Edith Wharton, Lytton Strachey, Ivy Compton-Burnett, Percy Lubbock, Oscar Wilde, a set of Walter Pater, including "The Renaissance," signed to Edmund Gosse from Henry James ("the three most exquisite writers of their time—some would say too exquisite"). On one of the shelves leans a framed photograph of his three sons as small boys, posed outside Blenheim Palace, where Consuelo Vanderbilt lived with her duke.

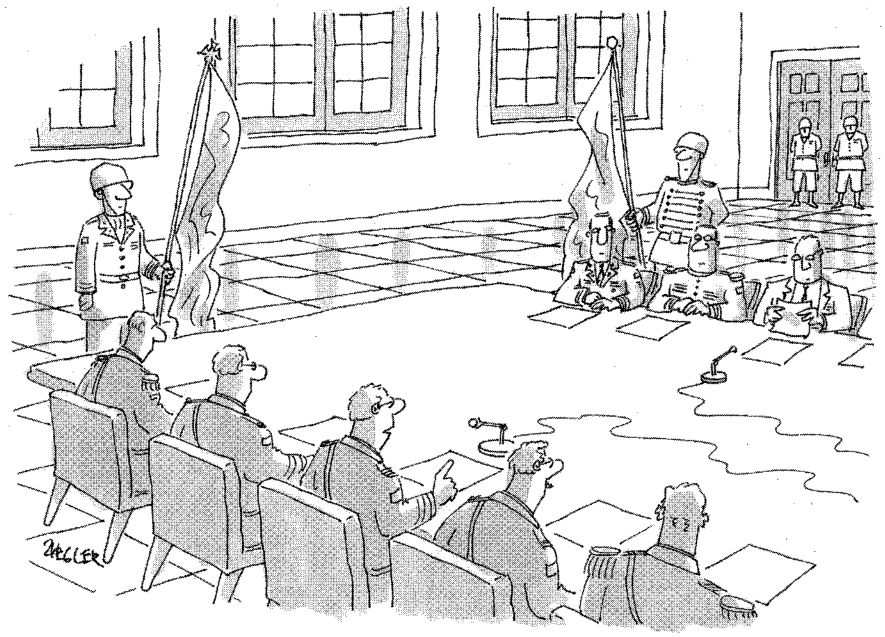
When he is not reading, he is writing a book. He just finished a fictional memoir about a mighty lawyer of the early nineteen-hundreds, one of the generation of the great Wall Street lawyers, like Paul Cravath or Francis Stetson. When he was just getting started, four months ago, he wasn't entirely happy about how it was turning out. It was too episodic, and while some of the chapters were pretty good, others were very bad indeed. But he has never taken himself or his writing too seriously. He packs his books off to the publisher without fuss. Afterward, if he gets a bad review, he might agree with it and think, Well, yes, that character was a bit thin and that other one perhaps a bit obvious. He is a shameless recycler of his own plots and images, even central ones. (He is not reverent about other people's writing, either. He thinks Turgenev would be better if you took out all the "discussions," and at one point he put together a kind of *Reader's Digest* condensed version of "Remembrance of Things Past" and tried—vainly—to persuade someone to publish it.)

Although Auchincloss worked full time as a lawyer for most of his adult life, there was never, for him, a question of conflict between writing and legal work: if someone was paying him to put together a document, well, it had to be done, that was all. (Though he didn't take his lawyering all that seriously, either—he didn't recruit many clients of his own, and, once the two partners senior to him died, his department's business dwindled to the point where it was running a loss.) Nor did he have any difficulty combining writing and family life. He would write his novels in the living room on a legal pad while his children played cowboys and Indians around him. "I don't remember any conflict coming up," he says. "I can't imagine what it would be. I didn't have a timetable on when a book was to be done. What difference would it make? If something came up for a week or so, I'd just give up writing for a week."

When he was young, Auchincloss hesitated to write fiction, paralyzed not only by his mother but also by his sense that, unless one was a genius, writing novels was rather an embarrassing thing to do, especially for a man, who was supposed to be engaged in some more respectable and lucrative employment. Wasn't there, after all, something effeminate about writing novels, something of the plumped pillow and the wistful gaze? And while the world could make use of a second-rate lawyer, he felt, it certainly had no need of another second-rate novelist. There was, too, in him some vestige of the old Puritanism that lingered in his parents' generation of old families—an aversion to artistic vanity. (One of his characters comments, with contempt, "You artists . . . can't look at a landscape or a bowl of fruit without thinking how you will put it on a canvas so that somebody else will see it as *your* landscape or *your* bowl of fruit. That is the inescapable vulgarity of art. [Charley] used his pen to try to see God. When he had seen him, his papers were no more use than autumn leaves.")

Embarrassment notwithstanding, he managed to write a four-hundred-and-twenty-four-page novel while at Yale ("a sort of 'Madame Bovary'") and sent it out to publishers. But when it was rejected—albeit with what he now recognizes were unusually nice, encouraging letters—he felt so violently mortified that he decided the only way he could redeem himself was to quit college and, submitting to the self-abnegation of manhood, enroll in law school right away. By the time he came back from military service, he had sufficiently recovered from the trauma of his first novel to send out another, based in part on his comically pointless wartime experience in Panama, and this one, "The Indifferent Children," was published. In the next four years, he published another novel and a short-story collection, and by the end of 1951 he was feeling bold enough to resign his position at his firm, Sullivan & Cromwell, and try out writing full time. He had to do it, he felt, although he liked being a lawyer: who knew what sort of writer he could become if he really gave it his all?

In an effort to become a proper writer, he decided that he ought to meet other writers and go to parties with them, so he fell in for a while with a group that met at the White Horse Tavern, on Hudson Street, in the Village. "A fellow named Bourjaily and his wife had a literary salon downtown, although they themselves were hardly highbrow," Gore Vidal says of this group. "But no one was literary then, except me and Louis." Vidal and Auchincloss, cousins by marriage (Vidal's mother was the second wife of Louis's cousin Hugh D. Auchincloss, whose third wife was the mother of Jacqueline Bouvier), met during this time and immediately took to one another. Auchincloss, in Vidal's view, was practically the only writer around who wasn't a pretentious idiot trying to be Hemingway. Auchincloss also met Norman Mailer and Herman Wouk at the White Horse Tavern, and he dutifully stayed up late and drank with them. (Years later, Mailer wondered that they should be so cordial, since they had nothing in common. "'Nothing in common!'" Auchincloss replied, as he described the encounter in a



"Giving our nation a few really expensive gifts would be a nice way to break the ice."

letter. "We live in the same silly island, publish our wet dreams, and go to the same silly parties—and have for years! It would take a mother's eye to tell the difference between us. Of course, it is true that I don't marry quite so much.")

But Auchincloss never convinced himself that being a drunken writer was really his thing, and he didn't convince most of the other people at the White Horse Tavern, either. "The fact that I was a Wall Street lawyer, a registered Republican, and a Social Registrite was quite enough for half the people at any one party to cross me off as a kind of duck-bill platypus not to be taken seriously," he recalled. He soon discovered that the work aspect of the writer's life didn't really suit him, either. He had almost no income, which was humiliating, and, in his thirties, was still being supported by his parents. And although he diligently put in the hours at his desk, he found that he wasn't even getting more writing done than he had before. He remembered that it had been rather fun scribbling in the fifteen minutes between appointments, or sitting on a hallway bench in the courthouse. In the spring of 1954, with great relief, he returned to Wall Street. Sullivan & Cromwell had a rule against rehiring, so for the remainder of his career he worked in the trusts-and-estates department of Hawkins, Delafield & Wood.

Two decades after his decision that the life of the artiste was not for him, Auchincloss wrote a short story titled "The Novelist of Manners." Dana Clyde, the eponymous novelist, has met with great success, but he has always nurtured a secret fantasy that he could have been a genius like Flaubert if it hadn't been for his love of the good life. "If I could only work as he worked," he said to himself. Then Leslie Carter, a young lawyer who idolizes Clyde, meets him and persuades him that he could indeed produce his "Madame Bovary" if he only tried hard enough. Inspired, Clyde abandons his beloved Paris for a year to work in seclusion on the Costa del Sol, at the end of which he produces a novel that is pretty good—but no "Madame Bovary." Among its minor characters is a savage caricature of Leslie Carter—revenge (as Clyde's wife explains to the distraught Leslie) for the destruction of his dream.

After Auchincloss retired from the law, he became, de facto, a full-time writer again, and this time he found that he enjoyed it. "I didn't have any push for the future because the future was over, so to speak," he says. "I was a retired partner, and all you had to do was die, which I didn't do. I had enough money. My securities had done well. I'd inherited something from my parents. Adele had a bit of money, not much but some. So the pressure was off." Which is why, when he sits in his study these days and a book isn't going well, he doesn't push himself past the point of pleasure. "I keep telling myself, 'Well, what does it matter if it doesn't come out?'" he says. "Because I've written enough. Enough for me."

When Howland Auchincloss, Louis's father, graduated from Groton, in 1904, he left with a lasting reverence for the otherworldly values of the Reverend Endicott Peabody, the school's eminent headmaster. Peabody had founded Groton, in 1884, with the idea that young boys needed to be secluded and kept pure for Christ until they emerged from puberty strong enough to resist the corrupting influence of the world. But these values, after college, led Howland not to the seminary but to Davis Polk, in which he invested so much idealism and love that the firm became to him, as his son put it, "almost . . . his church." Priscilla Auchincloss shared her husband's faith in the importance of the firm, believing that corporate lawyers were the conscience of Wall Street. In this, in their social circle, they were by no means unusual. "Matilda believed that in a divinely ordained system of free enterprise, the corporation lawyers were the high priests of the Deity," Auchincloss wrote of a law-firm partner's wife in his novel "The House of the Prophet," in a chapter set in the nineteen-thirties. "However much she respected birth and wealth . . . she reserved her highest esteem for those whose function it was to interpret laws that were to her as holy and as absolute as any that Moses received on the mountain top."

Banking, too, in those days was a sacred trust, an enterprise that embodied values superior to the merely material.

"You think too much of money-making, Guy," Rex, the brilliant and morally admirable second lead in Auchincloss's novel "The Embezzler" (also set in the thirties), admonishes his friend and fellow-banker.

"But we're in the money-making game!" Guy protests. "You may not judge a doctor or even a lawyer by his income, but how can you rate a money-maker except by the size of his pile?"

"Banking isn't just money-making,"

Rex says. "Banking is starting new businesses and saving old ones. Banking is helping the right man over a bad time. Banking is keeping the heart of the economy pumping. If you don't feel that way about it, you ought to quit and become a stockbroker."

The world in which these notions were not yet thought antique was the world in which Auchincloss was reared, but it began to disintegrate when he was fifteen, with Franklin Roosevelt's Inauguration in 1933. "The rulers of the exchange of mankind's goods have failed," Roosevelt told the nation in his Inaugural address. "There must be an end to a conduct in banking and in business which too often has given to a sacred trust the likeness of callous and selfish wrongdoing." Soon after taking office, Roosevelt abandoned that sacred trust in favor of enforcing Wall Street's morals by law, by setting up the Securities and Exchange Commission. All this was nothing less, Auchincloss's parents and their friends felt, than an outrageous attack on the integrity of the class that had reared Roosevelt and from which, presumably, his terribly high principles had come. Roosevelt was a Groton boy, Class of 1900, a student of Endicott Peabody; he had been exposed to the most exalted ideals of the Protestant establishment. Duty, honor, public service—that he should humiliate the guardians of these ideals was impossible to comprehend. Opinions of Roosevelt among Auchincloss's generation were mixed, but Auchincloss himself hated Roosevelt for the same reason that his parents did. Despite a mordant view of the morals of the world, he did believe then that his class was capable of better things—that, while its practices might be fundamentally mercantile, its ideals elevated those practices into a coherent ethical system, and it could be trusted to regulate itself, because its commitment to its own high standards remained vigorous and genuine.

It was bad enough for Roosevelt to insult the morals of Wall Street, but his attack, at least, could be rejected as the trumpeting of an ambitious politician who had likely fallen in with a gang of Communists manipulating him at the behest of foreign powers. Even more damaging to the self-esteem of Auchincloss's class was an incident that took place a few years later: the perfidy of a man who sat on the throne of the establishment, five times president of the New York Stock Exchange, another Groton boy from an old family, Richard Whitney. In 1929, Whitney had been regarded as the savior of the Stock Exchange, moving quickly to buy stocks to salvage their value in the crisis and persuading others to do the same. But in 1938 he was charged with embezzling more than a hundred thousand dollars from the estate of his father-in-law and a similar amount from the New York Yacht Club. He pleaded guilty to both charges and was sent to Sing Sing (where he was visited by Endicott Peabody). When he got out of jail, he was ostracized; many former friends and colleagues refused to speak to him as long as they lived. Auchincloss finds it difficult to convey the degree to which the Whitney scandal was shocking to his world, now that similar scandals are so common. Of A. Alfred Taubman, Sotheby's former chairman, who spent almost a year in prison for price-fixing, Auchincloss says in amazement, "He comes out of jail and he's just as popular and giving as many parties as he ever did! There's no disgrace in going to jail anymore unless it's for some disgusting, disgusting crime."

CHINESE POEM

Whatever change you were considering,
Do not plant another tree in the garden.
One tree means four seasons of sadness:
What is going,
                    What is coming,
What will not come,
                    What cannot go.

Here in bed, through the south window
I can see the moon watching us both,
Someone's hand around its clump of light.
Yours? I know you are sitting out there,
Looking at silver bloom against black.

That drop from your cup on the night sky's
Lacquer you wipe away with your sleeve
As if its pleated thickets were the wide space
Between us, though you know as well as I do
This autumn is no different from the last.

—*J. D. McClatchy*

In the mid-nineteen-sixties, ignoring the pleas of a Whitney who was a friend of his mother's to let the past stay buried for the sake of the children, Auchincloss wrote "The Embezzler," a fictional account of the scandal. The novel was a success, one of several best-sellers he has had. The Whitney character, Guy Prime, is a generous, handsome, loyal, cheerful fellow who sees everyone around him in the rosiest possible light. What remains oddly unexplained at the end of the novel is why the delightful Prime did what he did. He does not seem desperate or foolish enough to imagine that he would get away with it. Perhaps because of his gentle upbringing his attitude toward money is sufficiently careless that he does not perceive his "borrowing" as a real crime. But the reader is left with the impression that Auchincloss, in trying to come to terms with a man like him doing a thing like that, remained baffled.

It is the privilege of the establishment to experience its power as idealism. Auchincloss, aware that outsiders don't usually see it that way, is inclined, at least in his fiction, to extend all possible sympathy to the blinkered few. If the honor of his parents' generation was something that outsiders—suspicious because of their ignorance and embittered by their exclusion—could never understand, then outsiders were missing something important. (Thus the difference, for instance, between an outsider novelist of manners like John O'Hara and an insider novelist of manners like John Marquand: where O'Hara looked at society and saw smugness and hypocrisy, Marquand saw the bewilderment of the sheltered and a quixotic adherence to duty and self-limitation, no matter how absurd.) Outsiders might not believe that people like Howland Auchincloss hung up their hats in their Wall Street offices determined to act as the conscience of the corporate world; they might not believe that Endicott Peabodys really existed. Well, outsiders were wrong. "I remember an old jew in Brooklyn who laughed at me when I told him that S & C"—Sullivan & Cromwell—"was getting nothing for the work it did (via me) for the Foundation for the Blind," Auchincloss wrote to his mother in 1945. "We argued for some time, but no flicker of doubt entered his mind. I was 'young' and 'idealistic' and 'highly bred'; I knew nothing of what went on 'behind the scenes' when the mighty Dulles"—John Foster Dulles was a partner—"was closeted with the directors of the Foundation and what secret deals were pulled. . . . *He* knew New York—hadn't he been a lawyer for thirty years? Of course, like so many cynical jews, he believed that all people were like him except less smart. And that, don't you think, is their most trying characteristic: the unwillingness to concede any ethical approach in others higher than their own, the 'oh-ho I know *you*' attitude with which they sneer at a world that is bad enough to prove them right more than half the time. All of which, I suppose, would brand me as a hopeless anti-semite, nazi, etc., but one simply *can't* be bothered with labels any more."

Half a century later, in "The Scarlet Letters," a novel published in 2003 but set in 1953, Auchincloss wrote a scene that could almost be a parody of this letter. Almost: the man who speaks for old establishment ethics is successfully mocked and labelled, but he emerges with his integrity intact. Harry Hammersly, a louche and unscrupulous trusts-and-estates man, wants his firm to embrace the future in the form of a merger with Morris Applebaum, a firm that engages in practices such as hostile corporate takeovers and celebrity divorces, which the firm's dignified patrician founder, Ambrose Vollard, feels are beneath him. Hammersly accuses Vollard of objecting to the merger because Morris Applebaum is largely Jewish.

"What are you getting at?" Vollard says. "That I'm anti-Semitic? Nonsense! I have the greatest liking and respect for the considerable number of my Jewish friends. But when you're putting together an institution of a certain type of manners and morals, it makes sense to go in for a certain quantity of homogeneity. The particular trademark of Vollard Kaye is an old Yankee tradition of integrity, courage and gentlemanly behavior. Indeed, you can't mistake it. Now I'm not saying for a minute that Jews and Moslems and Chinamen and blacks are lacking in any of these virtues, but it so happens that they put them together in a different showcase."

"And that's not the showcase you want?"

"Well, let's simply put it that it's not *my* showcase. Is that anti-Semitism?"

"You know, I rather think it is."

Auchincloss has always enjoyed mocking the peccadilloes of his class, but he mocks from the inside, with the affection of family. When outsiders do it, it's different—harsher, cruder, unforgiving. Outsiders can't tell the difference between snobbery and delicacy; between acquisition and self-fashioning; between cynical hypocrisy and quixotic self-blinding, a poignant desire to see one's own limited world as the best place it could possibly be. Outsiders, when they see the grand stupidity of the great world, find it outrageous or entertaining; they don't have the grace, as insiders do, to find it sad. "As John"—his brother—"and I once agreed," he wrote in a letter to his mother, "the older we get the more we realize that the traditional stage version of 'society,' the pompous dowager, the marry-for-money young people, and all the gossip, which, like all 'elect,' we had for years sneered at as an outsider's sour grapes picture, is really rather accurate. Our friends *aren't* different."

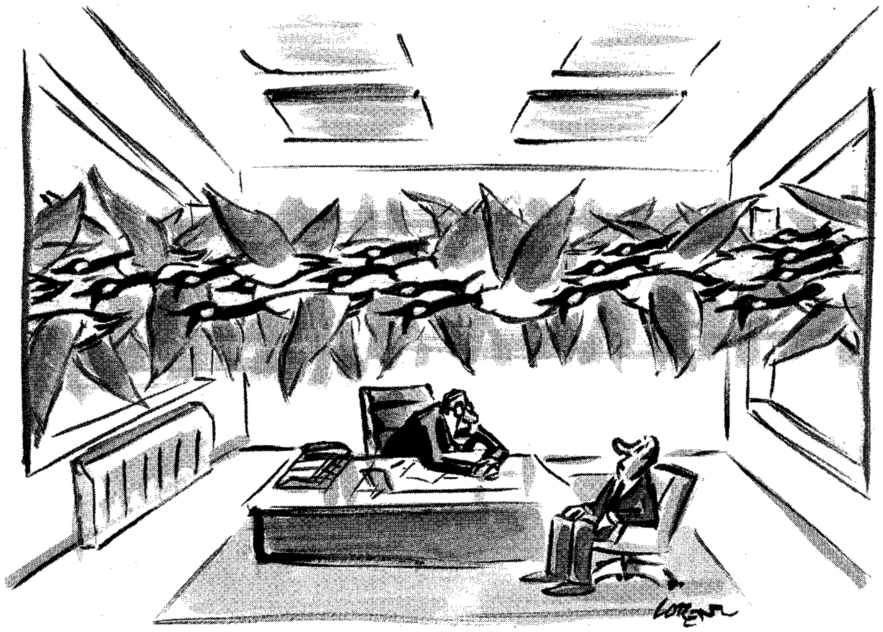
Auchincloss arrived at Groton in 1929, just before his twelfth birthday. He had been dreading the day since he was small. As he saw it, while women like his mother lived lives of elegant leisure, a man was fated to a life of crushing drudgery in a dismal countinghouse downtown, and boarding school was the first stage in a boy's transition from one to the other. Groton turned out to be worse than he had even imagined. There was no privacy—the toilet stalls had no doors—and no rest from endless, pointless activity. Endicott Peabody believed that corruption could fester in any place that afforded a boy a chance to be reflective or sentimental, so he subjected his charges to a vigilant regime of sport and communal enterprise. Auchincloss was a disaster from the start. He had no friends. He was a failure both as an athlete and as a scholar, but, more than that, he was, as he later put it, "naturally unpopular," possessing that indefinable but unmistakable quality that signals to his peers that a boy is to be ostracized and tormented. He was sneered at, called Rebecca for the Jewish appearance of his nose, kicked and shoved.

After two years of misery, he set out to better himself. Knowing that he had no chance at athletic accomplishment, he resolved to get high grades. "I was not such an ass as to kid myself that it was a key to popularity or to leadership, like personal charm or athletic prowess," he wrote later. But "to be successful in the world one did not have to be either popular or a leader. Everyone knew that 'tycoons' were often small, ugly, unamiable men. I did not exactly visualize myself becoming a tycoon, but I cherished the idea of unlikely predominances, and I thought of myself as a priest in medieval times using the church as a way to bypass birth and brawn." He succeeded so well at this that his mother, suspecting, rightly, that such single-minded attention to schoolwork indicated neglect of more socially acceptable activities, offered him a cash bribe to drop his average, but there was no helping his social situation. "No matter *what* one achieves, if one isn't a 'Groton' as opposed to an 'unGroton' boy, it never really matters," he wrote ten years later in a letter. "All my strivings to get to the top of the school, editor of the *Grotonian*, etc., were the most elementary type of psychological revenge, but I knew when I achieved my goals that I was no nearer to the *real*. Frankie Lawrance, Neddy Rogers, Whitney, Bill Macy were still 'people,' and I and Ben Pierce and Sam Hinckley and John Bates and Peyton Biddle *never* could be." At the time, with the conservatism of his type, he accepted all this as his natural lot. He did not despise his tormentors or the regime that permitted their behavior. "I was like those victims in Nazi prison camps who, brainwashed, clutched and kissed the hands of their guards," he wrote. "For I, too, believed in the Groton system. Had I not always known things would be thus?"

Auchincloss's embrace of the Groton system was not wholly a matter of jungle psychology, however; his conviction that the school was fundamentally good was animated by a quasi-religious reverence for Peabody. "I had very little real faith of any kind before I went to Groton," Auchincloss wrote in his memoir. "There the combination of my misery and loneliness with my bedazzlement by the awesome figure of the headmaster produced a state of brief but intense religiosity. I used afterwards to think of this period of my life as a kind of dark ages. I was a monk in an age of warring barbarians, but I always had a cross and a stained glass window before my reverent eyes." He also developed, as he put it, "a quality peculiarly unlovable in a seventeen-year-old: a tight political and social conservatism. I was like a British magnate who has risen from the ranks of labor to become a peer; I had had to work too hard to get where I was to care to denigrate the glory of the Groton establishment."

In later years, Auchincloss gradually became persuaded to take a more critical view of Peabody—he came to see that his obsession with purity might have done more harm than good to his warpable charges. But he never lost his faith that Peabody himself was as spotlessly pure and godly as he admonished his boys to be; and the figure of Peabody, the true New England Puritan, the man of sincere and enduring moral conviction, haunts his novels. Not directly—Auchincloss did not, as many assumed, use Peabody as his model for Francis Prescott, the Rector of Justin, in his book of that name. Prescott is a far more convoluted and ambiguous character. No, more in the sense that behind the mannered patter of his interwar New York dinner parties and law offices hovers the figure of the true Puritan. No matter how rare a creature he might have been, his sheer existence, and the belief of his peers in his existence, seems for Auchincloss to have given to that world, the world of his childhood, a gold standard, a moral legitimacy that later, more cynical eras lost.

For ten years after he graduated, the figure of the real Rector was so powerful in his mind that Auchincloss was unable to see the school clearly. It took another Groton boy to enlighten him, the writer Oliver LaFarge, who attended the school fifteen years before he did and wrote a memoir. "I don't know when I've read anything that has had a more profound effect on me," Auchincloss wrote to his mother. "I feel as if after a decade of illusion the scales had dropped from my eyes, and now I see Groton as the stifling institution it inherently is. And what has LaFarge done? He's done what no one before has attempted; he's drawn Groton *without* the Rector!! 'What is Groton without Peabody?' people say. What? It's *just* this 'dream,' this stuffy little group of snooty, cruel boys. And because of one man's gigantic shadow... I have closed my eyes all these years to what it did to me."



"All we know so far is that something seems to have disrupted their migratory pattern."

By the time Auchincloss published "The Rector of Justin," in 1956, he, like LaFarge, had separated Groton from the Rector. His rector, Francis Prescott, founds his school in the belief that, with discipline, violent sport, and faith in God, he can create a new generation of idealistic youths. At the end of his life, though, Prescott realizes that, according to his lights, he is a failure: Justin's graduates become bankers and lawyers just like the graduates of any other boarding school; almost none go into the ministry or public service. But if when he published "The Rector of Justin" Auchincloss was convinced that boarding school made boys miserable while doing them no good, still the thwarted ideals of the great school founders continued to move him. Yes, from the safety of adulthood he could condemn the whole enterprise of sport and manliness as ludicrous, and Prescott might have been a failure, but he was still the character in whom Auchincloss had invested more passion than any other. When his ideals are mocked, or even wisely dissected, Prescott always emerges greater, or at least holier, than his critics. Prescott, comments one such, "like all the great idiots of history, was always willing to burn the world for a toy, a prayer, a cross, a thimble." The desecration of the ideals themselves came later.

As a young man, Auchincloss used to say to his father that if the country were run by the men he'd known in college then everything would be all right. "The idealism, the sense of duty, were very noticeable at Yale in my day," Auchincloss says. Two men he had particularly in mind were William and McGeorge Bundy. He had roomed with William at Groton, and McGeorge had gone to the school, too, a year behind them. The Bundys were from Boston, Lowells on their mother's side, and they were, to Auchincloss's mind, exactly what Peabody's school was designed to produce: brilliant, forceful men of high ideals, dedicated to public service, untempted by materialism. (Groton's motto is *Cui servire est regnare*—To serve is to rule.) And yet both Bundys were unmistakably products of the Groton that Auchincloss had detested as well as the Groton that he had loved. They became known in Washington for a Brahmin superciliousness, tending to cruelty, which did not endear them to those whose non-Brahmin backgrounds made them sensitive to it, such as Lyndon Johnson.

When it became apparent that the Vietnam War was a disaster, it slowly became apparent to Auchincloss that he knew, at least in some small part, why the war had developed the way it had. The real trouble with Groton was not, as in "The Rector of Justin," that its graduates were conventional men of Wall Street, too shallow to aspire to the school's ideals. No, the ideals themselves were rotten. The trouble with Groton was that, through its potent combination of religion and sport, the school trained its boys to associate nobility with domination, duty with victory, dedication with ruthlessness. By 1980, when Auchincloss published "The House of the Prophet," a novel based on the life of Walter Lippmann, he had moved to the political center and was ready to condemn his moral inheritance more completely than he had in "Rector," a quarter century before.

"I suspect, if there be a danger in schools like Groton or Saint Paul's," Felix Leitner, the Walter Lippmann character, says, "it is not cookie-pushing"—idle foppery—"it is pugnacity. The violent games, the football, the intense team spirit, the sense of Christian gentlemen standing together against barbarians—I wonder if it doesn't all tend to make their graduates too aggressive, too belligerent. As if America were one team and the Soviet Union another, pitted against each other in a new kind of world series."

"Are you suggesting that the secretary of state and I are acting like schoolboys?" Stuart Hamill, a high public official and a college classmate of Leitner's, asks.

"Well, I remember, Stuart, in freshman year, that you actually wept when Harvard beat Yale!"

This last exchange was based not on Walter Lippmann's life but on Auchincloss's own: the weeping school patriot was William Bundy. "They were fine young men," Auchincloss says. "They were just as good as you could imagine, until you saw what they did. And we paid sixty-five thousand lives for that mistake. It really is very disheartening."

A novelist of manners must balance satire and nostalgia. If he is too indulgent, his story will collapse into sentiment; if too contemptuous, it dries up and becomes sociology. Auchincloss is the least gushy of writers: in his fiction he has virtually no interest in romantic love (though he is fascinated by male friendship), and of the human race as a whole he has a very low opinion. He can't abide writers like Whitman, who slosh about and "yearn," as he puts it. He is never maudlin about the nonsense of the past—the way parents and custom forced offspring into bad marriages and unsuitable work. And yet "The Rector of Justin" is his best novel, because it is one of the few times he permits his elegiac moralism to dominate a book. He loves his mad Puritans, and believes they are no more.

In the balancing of satire and nostalgia, the question becomes: Can you keep the good of the past and jettison the nonsense? Can you keep the Puritanism of the old Wall Street but marry whom you please? Can you let in new people and keep old ideals? Can you have the duty without the cruelty, Endicott Peabody without bad wars? At one point in "The Rector of Justin," an old friend of the Rector, a cynical old dandy who forsook the New World for Paris, tells the rector that you cannot. "The world of the private school," he says. "The world of the gentleman and his ideals. The world of personal honor and a Protestant God. When a civilization crumbles, it crumbles all together. The colors run out, the good with the bad. Roman virtue goes with the Roman arena, Voltaire and Watteau with the *lettre de cachet*. . . . You can't pick and choose in a flood."

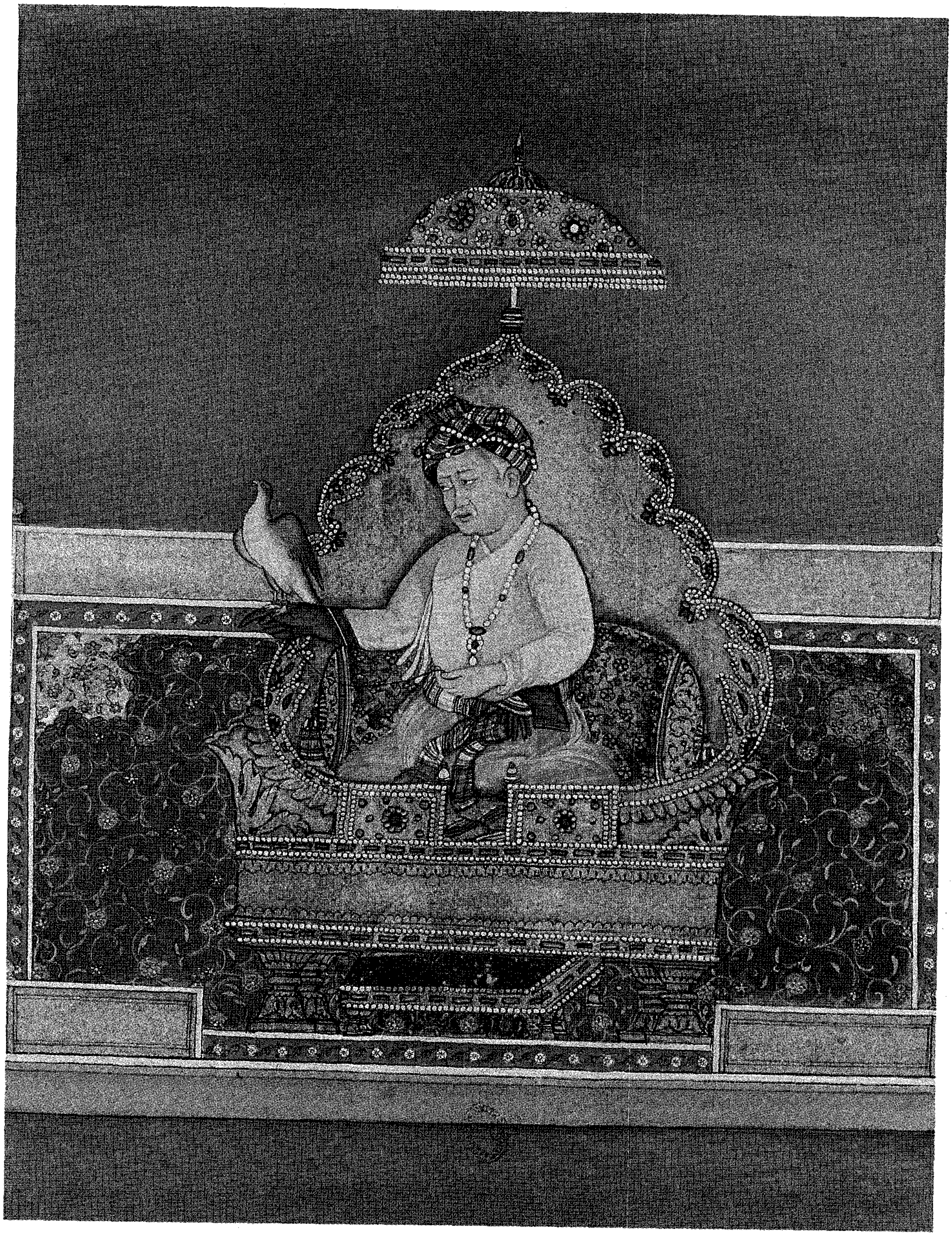
If you can't pick and choose, then you have to choose, and Auchincloss has always seemed moved to choose the past, even as he delights in the world's fresh surprises (he is no fogey), and even when he finds the past ridiculous. "Stuart's letter was unbelievably Stuarty," he wrote to his mother during the war. "He has been staying at the Thorons in Boston and loved their 'chinese porcelains, French books, Blake drawings, and Turner water colors, that kind of well-bred careless accumulation one finds in the roomy houses of Marlborough Street.' . . . Isn't it fantastic (and nice) that Stuart can be Stuart in 1942? For I feel more and more that I don't want a brave and earnest new world; I want people to be the same." As he grew older, even some aspects of the past which he hated at the time came to seem better than the present. "The tragedy of American civilization is that it has swept away WASP morality and put nothing in its place," Auchincloss wrote in a 1980 short story, "The Fabbri Tape." "Franklin Roosevelt was not a traitor to his class, as his old college classmates maintained: he was its last great representative."

When Auchincloss was a child, he was already looking backward, talking to old people about when they were young, and so his memory in a sense extends back even farther than his ninety years, to the childhoods of the people who were grandparents when he was a child, which is to say, back to the New York of the eighteen-sixties and seventies, around the Civil War. That is the time when his historical fiction takes place: when brownstone New York was so small that his mother and her mother could drop half a dozen visiting cards in one block; when his grandmother knew Edith Wharton as a girl visiting Newport; and when the thought of a robber baron like Commodore Vanderbilt or Jay Gould being accepted into proper society was still unthinkable. Auchincloss believes that Wharton was right to call that time the age of innocence, and he seems to feel more nostalgia for that time than for his own, even though, or perhaps because, he was never there to see it. "I think," he once wrote, "I would rather see the old reservoir on Forty-second Street or the original Madison Square Garden than I would any of the lost wonders of the ancient world." ◆

FICTION

THE SHELTER OF THE WORLD

BY SALMAN RUSHDIE



At dawn the haunting sandstone palaces of the new “victory city” of Akbar the Great looked as if they were made of red smoke. Most cities start giving the impression of being eternal almost as soon as they are born, but Sikri would always look like a mirage. As the sun rose to its zenith, the great bludgeon of the day’s heat pounded the flagstones, deafening human ears to all sounds, making the air quiver like a frightened blackbuck, and weakening the border between sanity and delirium, between what was fanciful and what was real.

Even the Emperor succumbed to fantasy. Queens floated within his palaces like ghosts, Rajput and Turkish sultanas playing catch-me-if-you-can. One of these royal personages did not really exist. She was an imaginary wife, dreamed up by Akbar in the way that lonely children dream up imaginary friends, and in spite of the presence of many living, if floating, consorts, the Emperor was of the opinion that it was the real queens who were the phantoms and the nonexistent beloved who was real. He gave her a name, Jodha, and no man dared gainsay him. Within the privacy of the women’s quarters, within the silken corridors of her palace, Jodha’s influence and power grew. The great musician Tansen wrote songs for her, and Master Abdus Samad the Persian portrayed her himself, painted her from the memory of a dream without ever looking upon her face, and when the Emperor saw his work he clapped his hands at the beauty shining up from the page. “You have captured her, to the life,” he cried, and Abdus Samad relaxed and stopped feeling as if his head were too loosely attached to his neck; and, after this visionary work by the master of the Emperor’s atelier had been exhibited, the whole court knew Jodha to be real, and the greatest courtiers, the *Navratna,* or Nine Jewels, all acknowledged not only her existence but also her beauty, her wisdom, the grace of her movements, and the softness of her voice. Akbar and Jodhabai! Ah, ah! It was the love story of the age.

BRIDGEMAN-GIRAUDON/ART RESOURCE, NY

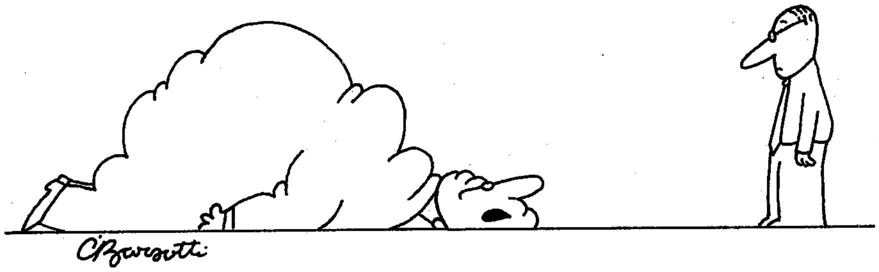
The city was finished at last, in time for the Emperor’s fortieth birthday. It had been twelve long, hot years in the making, but for a while he had been given the impression that it rose up effortlessly, year by year, as if by sorcery. The Emperor’s minister of works had not allowed any construction to go forward during the Emperor’s sojourns in the new imperial capital. When the Emperor was in residence, the stonemasons’ tools fell silent, the carpenters drove in no nails, the painters, the inlay workers, the hangers of fabrics, and the carvers of screens all disappeared from view. All then, it’s said, was cushioned pleasure. Only noises of delight were permitted to be heard. The bells on the ankles of dancers echoed sweetly, and fountains tinkled, and the soft music of the genius Tansen hung upon the breeze. There was whispered poetry in the Emperor’s ear, and in the pachisi courtyard on Thursdays there was much languid play, with slave girls being used as living pieces on the checkerboard floor. In the curtained afternoons, beneath the sliding punkahs, there was a quiet time for love.

No city is all palaces. The real city, built of wood and mud and dung and brick as well as stone, huddled beneath the walls of the mighty red-stone plinth upon which the royal residences stood. Its neighborhoods were determined by race as well as by trade. Here was the silversmiths’ street, there the hot-gated, clanging armories, and there, down that third gully, the place of bangles and clothes. To the east was the Hindu colony, and beyond that, curling around the city walls, the Persian quarter, and beyond that the region of the Turanis, and beyond that, in the vicinity of the giant gate of the Friday Mosque, the homes of those Muslims who were Indian born. Dotted around the countryside were the villas of the nobles, the art-studio-and-scriptorium whose fame had already spread throughout the land, and a pavilion of music, and another for the performance of dances. In most of these lower Sikris, there was little time for indolence, and when the Emperor came home from the wars the command of silence felt, in the mud city, like a suffocation. Chickens had to be gagged at the moment of their slaughter for fear of disturbing the repose of the king of kings. A cart wheel that squeaked could earn the cart’s driver the lash, and if he cried out under the whip the penalty could be even more severe. Women giving birth withheld their cries, and the dumb show of the marketplace was a kind of madness. “When the King is here, we are all made mad,” the people said, adding, hastily, for there were spies and traitors everywhere, “for joy.” The mud city loved its Emperor, it insisted that it did, insisted without words, for words were made of that forbidden fabric, sound. When the Emperor set forth once more on his campaigns—his never-ending (though always victorious) battles against the armies of Gujarat and Rajasthan, of Kabul and Kashmir—then the prison of silence was unlocked, and trumpets burst out, and cheers, and people were finally able to tell one another everything they had been obliged to keep unsaid for months on end: *I love you. My mother is dead. Your soup tastes good. If you do not pay me the money you owe me, I will break your arms at the elbows. My darling, I love you, too.* Everything.

Fortunately for the mud city, military matters often took Akbar away. In fact, he had been away most of the time, and in his absences the din of the clustered poor, as well as the racket of the unleashed construction workers, daily vexed the impotent queens. The queens lay together and moaned, and what they did to distract one another, what entertainment they found in one another in their veiled quarters, will not be described here. Only the imaginary queen remained pure, and it was she who told Akbar of the privations the people were suffering because of the desire of overzealous officials to ease his time at home. As soon as the Emperor learned this, he countermanded the order, replaced the minister of works with a less dour individual, and insisted on riding through the streets of his oppressed subjects crying out, “Make as much racket as you like, people! Noise is life, and an excess of noise is a sign that life is good. There will be time for us all to be quiet when we are safely dead.” The city burst into joyful clamor.

That was the day on which it became clear that a new kind of king was on the throne, and that nothing in the world would remain the same.

The country was at peace at last, but the King’s spirit was never calm. The King had just returned from his last campaign; he had slapped down the upstart in Surat, but through the long days of marching and war his mind wrestled with philosophical and linguistic conundrums as much as with military ones. The Emperor Abul-Fath Jalaluddin Muhammad, King of Kings, known since his childhood as Akbar, meaning “the great,” and latterly, in spite of the tautology of it, as Akbar the Great, the great great one, great in his



"You don't need to understand—just go get a goddam bicycle pump."

• •

greatness, doubly great, so great that the repetition in his title was not only appropriate but necessary in order to express the gloriousness of his glory—the Grand Mughal, the dusty, battle-weary, victorious, pensive, incipiently overweight, disenchanted, mustachioed, poetic, oversexed, and absolute emperor, who seemed altogether too magnificent, too world-encompassing, and, in sum, too *much* to be a single human personage—this all-engulfing flood of a ruler, this swallower of worlds, this many-headed monster who referred to himself in the first-person plural—had begun to meditate, during his long, tedious journey home, on which he was accompanied by the heads of his defeated enemies bobbing in their sealed earthen pickle jars, about the disturbing possibilities of the first-person singular—the "I."

He, Akbar, had never referred to himself as "I," not even in private, not even in anger or dreams. He was—what else could he be?—"we." He was the definition, the incarnation of, the We. He had been born into plurality. When he said "we," he naturally and truly meant himself as an incarnation of all his subjects, of all his cities and lands and rivers and mountains and lakes, as well as all the animals and plants and trees within his frontiers, and also the birds that flew overhead and the mordant twilight mosquitoes and the nameless monsters in their underworld lairs, gnawing slowly at the roots of things; he meant himself as the sum total of all his victories, himself as containing the characters, the abilities, the histories, perhaps even the souls of his decapitated or merely pacified opponents; and, in addition, he meant himself as the apogee of his people's past and present, and the engine of their future.

This "we" was what it meant to be a king—but commoners, he now allowed himself to consider, in the interest of fairness, and for the purposes of debate, no doubt occasionally thought of themselves as plural, too.

Were they wrong? Or (O traitorous thought!) was he? Perhaps this idea of self-as-community was what it meant to be a being in the world, any being; such a being being, after all, inevitably a being among other beings, a part of the beingness of all things. Perhaps plurality was not exclusively a king's prerogative, perhaps it was not, after all, his divine right. One might further argue that, since the reflections of a monarch were, in less exalted and refined form, doubtless mirrored in the cogitations of his subjects, it was accordingly inevitable that the men and women over whom he ruled should also conceive of themselves as "we"s. They saw themselves, perhaps, as plural entities made up of themselves plus their children, mothers, aunts, employers, co-worshippers, fellow-workers, clans, and friends. They, too, saw their selves as multiple, one self that was the father of their children, another that was their parents' child; they knew themselves to be different with their employers than they were at home with their wives—in short, they were all bags of selves, bursting with plurality, just as he was. Was there then no essential difference between the ruler and the ruled? And now his original question reasserted itself in a new and startling form: if his many-selved subjects managed to think of themselves in the singular rather than the plural, could he, too, be an "I"? Could there be an "I" that was simply oneself? Were there such naked, solitary "I"s buried beneath the overcrowded "we"s of the earth? It was a question that frightened him as he rode his white horse home, fearless, unvanquished, and, it must be conceded, beginning to be fat; and when it popped into his head at night he did not easily sleep. What should he say when he saw his Jodha again? If he were to say simply, "I'm back," or "It is I," might she, in return, feel able to call him by that second-person singular, that *tu* which was reserved for children, lovers, and gods? And what would that mean? That he was like her child, or godlike, or simply the lover of whom she, too, had dreamed, whom she had dreamed into being as eagerly as he had dreamed her? Might that little word, that *tu*, turn out to be the most arousing word in the language? "I," he practiced under his breath. *Here "I" am. "I" love you. Come to "me."*

One final military engagement disturbed his contemplation on the homeward road. One more upstart princeling to slap down. A diversion into the Kathiawar Peninsula to quell the obstinate Rana of Cooch Naheen, a young man with a big mouth and a bigger mustache (the Emperor was vain about his own mustache, and took unkindly to competitors), a feudal ruler absurdly fond of talking about freedom. Freedom for whom, and from what, the Emperor harrumphed inwardly. Freedom was a children's fantasy, a game for women to play.

No man was ever free. His army moved through the white trees of the Gir Forest like a silently approaching plague, and the pathetic little fortress of Cooch Naheen, seeing the advent of death in the rustling treetops, broke its own towers, ran up a flag of surrender, and begged abjectly for mercy. Often, instead of executing his vanquished opponents, the Emperor would marry one of their daughters and give his defeated father-in-law a job: better a new family member than a rotting corpse. This time, however, he had irritably torn the insolent Rana's mustache off his handsome face, and chopped the weakling dreamer into garish pieces—had done so personally, with his own sword, just as his grandfather would have, and had then retreated to his quarters to tremble and mourn.

The Emperor's eyes were slanted and large and gazed upon infinity as a dreamy young lady might, or a sailor in search of land. His lips were full and pushed forward in a womanly pout. But in spite of these girlish accents he was a mighty specimen of a man, huge and strong. As a boy, he had killed a tigress with his bare hands and then, driven to distraction by his deed, had forever forsworn the eating of meat and become a vegetarian. A Muslim vegetarian, a warrior who wanted only peace, a philosopher-king: a contradiction in terms. Such was the greatest ruler the land had ever known.

In the melancholy after battle, as evening fell upon the empty dead, below the broken fortress melting into blood, within earshot of a little waterfall's nightingale song—*bul-bul, bul-bul,* it sang—the Emperor in his brocade tent sipped watered wine and lamented his gory genealogy. He did not want to be like his bloodthirsty ancestors, even though his ancestors were the greatest men in history. He felt burdened by the names of the marauder past, the names from which his name descended in cascades of human blood: his grandfather Babar, the warlord of Ferghana, who had conquered, but always loathed, this new dominion, this India of too much wealth and too many gods, Babar the battle machine, with an unexpected gift for felicitous words; and before Babar the murderous princes of Transoxiana and Mongolia, and mighty Temüjin above all—Genghis, Changez, Jenghis, or Chinggis Qan—thanks to whom he, Akbar, had to accept the name of *Mughal,* had to be the *Mongol* he was not, or did not feel himself to be. He felt . . . *Hindustani.* His horde was neither Golden, Blue, nor White. The very word "horde" struck his subtle ears as ugly, swinish, coarse. He did not want hordes. He did not want to pour molten silver into the eyes of his vanquished foes or crush them to death beneath the platform upon which he was eating his dinner. He was tired of war.

He remembered the tutor of his childhood, a Persian Mir, telling him that for a man to be at peace with himself he must be at peace with all others. *Sulh-i-kul,* complete peace. No Khan could understand such an idea. He did not want a Khanate. He wanted a country.

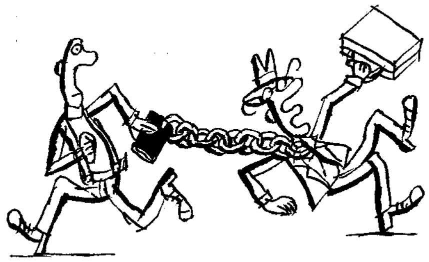
The Rana of Cooch Naheen, young, slender, and dark, had knelt at Akbar's feet, his face hairless and bleeding, waiting for the blow to fall. "History repeats itself," he said. "Your grandfather killed my grandfather seventy years ago."

"Our grandfather," replied the Emperor, employing the royal plural according to custom, for this was not the time for his experiment with the singular—this wretch did not merit the privilege of witnessing it—"was a barbarian with a poet's tongue. We, by contrast, are a poet with a barbarian's history and a barbarian's prowess in war, which we detest. Thus it is demonstrated that history does not repeat itself but moves forward, and that Man is capable of change."

"That is a strange remark for an executioner to make," the young Rana said softly. "But it is futile to argue with Death."

"Your time has come," the Emperor assented. "So tell us truthfully before you go, what sort of paradise do you expect to discover when you have passed through the veil?" The Rana raised his mutilated face and looked the Emperor in the eye. "In Paradise, the words 'worship' and 'argument' mean the same thing," he declared. "The Almighty is not a tyrant. In the house of God, all voices are free to speak as they choose, and that is the form of their devotion." He was an irritating, holier-than-thou type of youth, that was beyond question, but in spite of his annoyance Akbar was moved. "We promise you that we will build that house of adoration here on earth," the Emperor said. Then, with a cry—*Allahu Akbar,* "God is great," or, just possibly, "Akbar is God"—he chopped off the pompous little twerp's cheeky, didactic, and therefore suddenly unnecessary head.

In the hours after he killed the Rana, the Emperor was possessed by his familiar demon of loneliness. Whenever a man spoke to him as an equal, it drove him crazy, and this was a fault, he understood that. A king's anger was always a fault; an angry king was like a god who made mistakes. And here was another contradiction in him. He was not only a barbarian philosopher and a crybaby killer but also an egotist addicted to obsequiousness and sycophancy who nevertheless longed for a different world, a world in which he could find exactly that man who was his equal, whom he could meet as his brother, with whom he could speak freely, teaching and learning, giving and receiving pleasure, a world in which he could forsake the gloating satisfactions of conquest for the gentler yet more taxing joys of discourse. Did such a world exist? By what road could it be reached? Was there such a man anywhere in the world, or had he just executed him? What if the Rana of the mustache had been the only one? Had he just slain the only man on earth whom he might have loved? The Emperor's thoughts grew vinous and sentimental, his eyes blurring with drunken tears.



How could he become the man he wanted to be? The *akbar,* the great one? How?

There was nobody to talk to. He had ordered his stone-deaf body servant, Bhakti Ram Jain, away, out of his tent, so that he could drink in peace. A body servant who could not hear his master's ramblings was a blessing, but Bhakti Ram Jain had learned to read his lips now, which undid much of his value, making him an eavesdropper like everyone else. *The king is mad.* They said that: everyone said that. His soldiers his people his wives. Probably Bhakti Ram Jain said so as well. They did not say it to his face, for he was a giant of a man and a puissant warrior, like a hero out of the ancient tales, and he was also the king of kings, and if such a one wished to be a little nutty then who were they to argue? The King, however, was not mad. The King was not content with being. He was striving to become.

Very well. He would keep his promise to the dead Kathiawari princeling. In the heart of his victory city he would build a house of adoration, a place of disputation where everything could be said to everyone by anyone on any subject, including the nonexistence of God and the abolition of kings. He would teach himself humility in that house. No, now he was being unfair to himself. Not "teach." Rather, he would remind himself of, and recover, the humility that was already lodged deep in his heart. This humble Akbar was perhaps his best self, created by the circumstances of his childhood in exile, clothed now in adult grandeur but still present nonetheless; a self born not in victory but in defeat. Nowadays, it was all victories, but the Emperor knew all about defeat. Defeat was his father. Its name was Humayun.

He didn't like thinking about his father. His father had smoked too much opium, lost his empire, got it back only after he pretended to become a Shiite (and gave away the Koh-i-noor diamond) so that the King of Persia would give him an army to fight with, and had then died by falling down a flight of library stairs almost immediately after regaining his throne. Akbar hadn't known his father. He himself had been born in Sind, after Humayun was defeated at Chausa, and then scurried off to Persia, abandoning his son. *His fourteen-month-old son.* Who was found and raised by his father's brother and enemy, Uncle Askari of Kandahar, wild man Uncle Askari, who would have killed Akbar himself if he could ever have got close enough, which he couldn't, because his wife was always in the way.

Akbar lived, because his aunt wanted him to. And in Kandahar he was taught about survival, about fighting and killing and hunting, and he learned much else without being taught, such as how to look out for himself and watch his tongue and not say the wrong thing, the thing that might get him killed. About the dignity of the lost, about losing, and how it cleansed the soul to accept defeat, and about letting go, avoiding the trap of holding on too tightly to what you wanted, and about abandonment in general, and in particular fatherlessness, the lessness of fathers, the lessness of the fatherless, and the best defenses of those who are less against those who are more: inwardness, forethought, cunning, humility, and good peripheral vision. The many lessons of lessness. The lessening from which growing could begin.

There were things, however, that nobody thought to teach him, and that he would never learn. "We are the Emperor of India, Bhakti Ram Jain, but we can't write our own damn name!" he shouted at his body servant at dawn, as the old man helped him with his ablutions.

"Yes, O most blessed entity, father of many sons, husband of many wives, monarch of the world, encompasser of the earth," said Bhakti Ram Jain, handing him a towel. This time, the hour of the King's levee, was also the hour of imperial flattery. Bhakti Ram Jain proudly held the rank of Imperial Flatterer First Class, and was a master of the ornate, old-school style known as cumulative fawning. Only a man with an excellent memory for the baroque formulations of excessive encomiums could fawn cumulatively, on account of the repetitions required and the necessary precision of the sequencing. Bhakti Ram Jain's memory was unerring. He could fawn for hours.

The Emperor saw his own face scowling back at him from his basin of warm water like an augury of doom. "We are the king of kings, Bhakti Ram Jain, but we can't read our own laws. What do you say to that?"

"Yes, O most just of judges, father of many sons, husband of many wives, monarch of the world, encompasser of the earth, ruler of all that is, bringer together of all being," said Bhakti Ram Jain, warming to his task.

"We are the Sublime Radiance, the Star of India, and the Sun of Glory," said the Emperor, who knew a thing or two about flattery himself. "Yet we were raised in that shithole dump of a town where men fuck women to make babies but fuck boys to make them men—raised watching out for the attacker who worked from behind as well as the warrior straight ahead."

"Yes, O dazzling light, father of many sons, husband of many wives, monarch of the world, encompasser of the earth, ruler of all that is, bringer together of all being, Sublime Radiance, Star of India, and Sun of Glory," said Bhakti Ram Jain, who might have been deaf but who knew how to take a hint.

"Is that how a king should be raised, Bhakti Ram Jain?" the Emperor roared, tipping over the basin in his wrath. "Illiterate, ass-guarding, savage—is that what a prince should be?"

"Yes, O wiser than the Wise, father of many sons, husband of many wives, monarch of the world, encompasser of the earth, ruler of all that is, bringer together of all being, Sublime Radiance, Star of India, Sun of Glory, master of human souls, forger of thy people's destiny," said Bhakti Ram Jain.

"You are pretending you can't read the words on our lips!" the Emperor shouted.

"Yes, O more insightful than the Seers, father of many—"

"You are a goat who should have his throat slit so that we can eat his meat for lunch."

"Yes, O more merciful than the gods, father—"

"Your mother fucked a pig to make you."

"Yes, O most articulate of all who articulate, f—"

"Never mind," said the Emperor. "We feel better now. Go away. You can live."

And here again with bright silks flying like banners from red palace windows was Sikri, shimmering in the heat like an opium vision. Here at last, with its strutting peacocks and dancing girls, was home. If the war-torn world was a harsh truth, then Sikri was a beautiful lie. The Emperor came home like a smoker returning to his pipe. He was the Enchanter. In this place he would conjure a new world, a world beyond religion, region, rank, and tribe. The most beautiful women in the world were here, and they were all his wives. The most brilliant talents in the land were assembled here, among them the Nine Jewels, the nine most brilliant of the most brilliant, and with their help there was nothing he could not accomplish. And then there was Birbal, the best of the nine, who were the best of the best. His first minister, and first friend.

The first minister and greatest wit of the age greeted him at the Hiran Minar, the tower of elephants' teeth. The Emperor's sense of mischief was aroused. "Birbal," Akbar said, dismounting from his horse, "will you answer me one question? We have been waiting a long time to ask it." The first minister of legendary wit and wisdom bowed humbly. "As you wish, *Jahanpanah,* Shelter of the World." "Well, then," said Akbar, "which came first, the chicken or the egg?" Birbal replied at once, "The chicken." Akbar was taken aback. "How can you be so sure?" he wanted to know. "*Huzoor,*" Birbal replied, "I promised to answer only one question."

The first minister and the Emperor were standing on the ramparts of the city, looking out at the wheeling crows. "Birbal," Akbar mused, "how many crows do you imagine there are in my kingdom?" "*Jahanpanah,*" Birbal replied, "there are exactly nine hundred and ninety-nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine." Akbar was puzzled. "Suppose we have them counted," he said, "and there are more than that, what then?" "That would mean," Birbal replied, "that their friends from the neighboring kingdom have come to visit them." "And if there are fewer?" "Then some of ours will have gone abroad to see the wider world."

A great linguist was waiting at Akbar's court, a visitor from a distant Western land: a Jesuit priest who could converse and dispute fluently in dozens of languages. He challenged the Emperor to discover his native language. While the Emperor was pondering the riddle, his first minister circled the priest and all of a sudden kicked him violently in the backside. The priest let out a series of oaths—not in Portuguese but in Italian. "You observe, *Jahanpanah*," said Birbal, "that when it's time to unleash a few insults a man will always choose his mother tongue."

"If you were an atheist, Birbal," the Emperor challenged his first minister, "what would you say to the true believers of all the great religions of the world?" Birbal was a devout Brahmin from Trivikrampur, but he answered unhesitatingly, "I would say to them that in my opinion they were all atheists as well; I merely believe in one god less than each of them." "How so?" the Emperor asked. "All true believers have good reasons for disbelieving in every god except their own," said Birbal. "And so it is they who, between them, give me all the reasons for believing in none."

The first minister and the Emperor were standing at the Khwabgah, the Place of Dreams, looking out over the still surface of the Anup Talao, the monarch's private, formal pool, the Pool Without Peer, the best of all possible pools, of which it was said that when the kingdom was in trouble its waters would send a warning. "Birbal," said Akbar, "as you know, our favorite queen has the misfortune not to exist. Even though we love her best of all, admire her above all the others, and value her above even the lost Koh-i-noor, she is inconsolable. 'Your ugliest, most sour-natured shrew of a wife is still made of flesh and blood,' she says. 'In the end, I will not be able to compete with her.' "

The first minister advised the Emperor, '*Jahanpanah*, you must say to her that it is precisely *in the end* that her victory will be apparent to everyone, for in the end none of the queens will exist any more than she does, while she will have enjoyed a lifetime of your love, and her fame will echo down the ages. Thus, in reality, while it is true that she does not exist, it is also true to say that she is the one who lives. If she did not, then over there, behind that high window, there would be nobody waiting for your return."

Jodha's sisters, her fellow-wives, resented her. How could the mighty Emperor prefer the company of a woman who did not exist? When he was gone, at least, she ought to absent herself as well; she had no business to hang around with the actually existing. She should disappear like the apparition she was, slide into a mirror or a shadow and be lost. That she did not, the living queens concluded, was the sort of solecism one had to expect from an imaginary being. How could she have been brought up to know her manners when she had not been brought up at all? She was an untutored figment, and deserved to be ignored.

The Emperor had put her together, they fumed, by stealing bits of them all. He said she was the daughter of the Prince of Jodhpur. She was not! That was another queen, and she was not the daughter but the sister. The Emperor also believed his fictitious beloved was the mother of his firstborn son, his long-awaited firstborn son, conceived because of the blessing of a saint, that very saint beside whose hilltop hovel this victory city had been built. But she was not Prince Salim's mother, as Prince Salim's real mother, Rajkumar Hira Kunwari, known as Mariam-uz-Zamani, daughter of Raja Bihar Mal of Amer, of the Clan Kachhwaha, grievingly told anybody who would listen. So: the limitless beauty of the imaginary queen came from one consort, her Hindu religion from another, and her incalculable wealth from yet a third. Her temperament, however, was Akbar's own creation. No real woman was ever like that, so perfectly attentive, so undemanding, so endlessly available.

She was an impossibility, a fantasy of perfection. They feared her, knowing that, being impossible, she was irresistible, and that was why the King loved her best. They hated her for her theft of their histories. If they could have murdered her they would have done so, but until the Emperor tired of her, or died himself, she was immortal. The idea of the Emperor's death was not beyond contemplation, but so far the queens were not contemplating it. So far, they bore their grievances in silence. "The Emperor is mad," they grumbled inwardly, but sensibly forbore to utter the words. And when he was galloping around killing people they left the imaginary consort to her own devices. They never spoke her name. *Jodha, Jodhabai.* She wandered the palace quarters alone. She was a lonely shadow glimpsed through latticed stone screens. She was a cloth blown by the breeze. At night she stood under the little cupola on the top story of the Panch Mahal and scanned the horizon for the return of the King, who made her real.

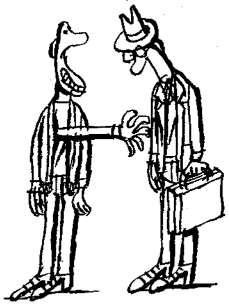
Jodha knew that her illustrious husband must have had witchcraft in his blood. Everyone had heard about Genghis Khan's necromancy, his use of animal sacrifice and occult herbs, and how, by the use of the black arts, he managed to sire eight hundred thousand descendants.

Everyone had heard the tale of how Timur the Lame after conquering the

earth had tried to ascend to the stars and conquer the heavens, too. Everyone knew the story of how the Emperor Babar had saved the dying Humayun's life by circling his sickbed and luring Death away from the boy to the father, sacrificing himself so that his son might live. These dark pacts with Death and the Devil were her husband's heritage, and her own existence the proof of how strong the magic was in him.

The creation of a real life from a dream was a superhuman act, usurping the prerogative of the gods. In those days, Sikri was swarming with poets and artists, those preening egotists who claimed for themselves the power of language and image to conjure beautiful somethings from empty nothings, and yet neither poet nor painter, musician nor sculptor had come close to what the Emperor, the Perfect Man, had achieved. The court was also full of foreigners, pomaded exotics, weather-beaten merchants, narrow-faced priests from the West, boasting in ugly, undesirable tongues about the majesty of their lands, their gods, their kings. When the Emperor showed her the pictures of their mountains and valleys they'd brought with them, she thought of the Himalayas and of Kashmir and laughed at the foreigners' paltry approximations of natural beauty, their *vaals* and *aalps*, half-words to describe half-things. Their kings were savages, and they had nailed their god to a tree. What did she want with people as ridiculous as that?

They came in search of—what, exactly? Nothing of use. If they had possessed any wisdom, the inutility of their journeying would have been obvious to them. Travel was pointless. It removed you from the place in which you had a meaning, and to which you gave meaning in return by dedicating your life to it, and spirited you away into fairylands where you were, and looked, frankly absurd.



Yes: this place, Sikri, was a fairyland to them, just as their England and Portugal, their Holland and France, were beyond her ability to comprehend. The world was not all one thing. "We are their dream," she had told the Emperor. "And they are ours." She loved him because he never dismissed her opinions, never swatted them away with the majesty of his hand. "But imagine, Jodha, if we could awake in other men's dreams and change them, and if we had the courage to invite them into ours," he told her while they slapped down *ganjifa* playing cards one evening. "What if the whole world became a single waking dream?" She could not call him a fantasist when he spoke of waking dreams, for what else was she?

She had never left the palaces in which she had been born a decade earlier, born an adult, to the man who was not only her creator but her lover. It was true: she was both his wife and his child. If she left the palaces, or so she had always suspected, the spell would be broken and she would cease to exist. Perhaps she could do it if he, the Emperor, were there to sustain her with the strength of his belief, but if she were alone she wouldn't have a chance. Fortunately, she had no desire to leave. The labyrinth of walled and curtained corridors that connected the various buildings of the palace complex afforded her all the possibilities for travel she required. This was her little universe. She lacked a conqueror's interest in elsewhere. Let the rest of the world be for others. This square of fortified stone was hers.

She was a woman without a past, separate from history, or, rather, possessing only such history as he had been pleased to bestow upon her, and which the other queens bitterly contested. The question of her independent existence, of whether she had one, insisted on being asked, over and over, whether she willed it or not. If God turned his face away from his creation, Man, would Man simply cease to be?

That was the large-scale version of the question, but it was the selfish, small-scale versions that bothered her. Was her will free of the man who had willed her into being? Did she exist only because of his suspension of disbelief in the possibility of her existence? If he died, could she go on living?

She felt a quickening of her pulse. Something was about to happen. She felt herself strengthen, solidify. Doubts fled from her. *He was coming.*

The Emperor had entered the palace complex, and she could feel the power of his approaching need. Yes. Something was about to happen. She felt his footfall in her blood, could see him in herself, growing larger as he walked toward her. She was his mirror, because he had created her that way, but she was herself as well. Yes. Now that the act of creation was complete, she was free to be the person he had created, free, as everyone was, within the bounds of what it was in their nature to be and to do. How strong she suddenly was, how full of blood and rage. His power over her was far from absolute. All she had to be was coherent. She had never felt more coherent. Her nature rushed into her like a flood. She was not subservient. He did not like subservient women.

She would scold him first. How could he stay away so long? In his absence, she had had to combat many plots. All was untrustworthy here. The very walls were filled with whispers. She had fought them all and kept the palace safe against the day of his return, defeating the small, self-serving treacheries of the domestic staff, confounding the spying lizards hanging on the walls, stilling the scurry of conspiratorial mice. All this while she felt herself fading, while the mere struggle for survival required the exercise of almost the full force of her will. The other queens . . . no, she would not mention the other queens. The other queens did not exist. Only she existed. She, too, was a sorceress. She was the sorceress of herself.

There was only one man she needed to enchant, and he was here. He was not going to the other queens. He was coming to what pleased him. She was full of him, of his desire for her, of the something that was about to happen. She was the scholar of his need. She knew everything.

The door opened. She existed. She was immortal, because she had been created by love.

He was wearing a cockaded golden turban and a coat of gold brocade. He was wearing the dust of his conquered land like a soldier's badge of honor. He was wearing a sheepish grin. " 'I' wanted to get home faster," he said. " 'I' was delayed." There was something awkward and experimental about his speech. What was the matter with him?

She decided to ignore his uncharacteristic hesitancy and proceed as she had planned.

"Oh, you 'wanted,' " she said, standing upright, in her ordinary day clothes, pulling a silken head scarf across the lower portion of her face. "A man doesn't know what he wants. A man doesn't want what he says he wants. A man wants only what he needs."

He was puzzled by her refusal to acknowledge his descent into the first person, which honored her, which was supposed to make her swoon with joy, which was his newest discovery and his declaration of love. Puzzled, and a little put out.

"How many men have you known, that you are so knowledgeable?" he said, frowning, approaching her. "Did you dream up men for yourself while 'I' was away, or did you find men to pleasure you, men who were not dreams? Are there men that 'I' must kill?" Surely this time she would notice the revolutionary, erotic newness of the pronoun? Surely now she would understand what he was trying to say?

She did not. She believed she knew what aroused him, and was thinking only of the words she had to say to make him hers.

"Women think less about men in general than the generality of men can imagine. Women think about their own men less often than their men like to believe. All women need all men less than all men need them. This is why it is so important to keep a good woman down. If you do not keep her down, she will surely get away."

She hadn't dressed up to receive him. "If you want dolls," she said, "go over to the doll's house, where they're waiting for you, prettifying and squealing and pulling one another's hair." This was a mistake. She had mentioned the other queens. His brow furrowed and his eyes clouded over. She had made a false move. The spell had almost broken. She poured all the force of her eyes into his, and he came back to her. The magic held. She raised her voice and continued. She didn't flatter him. "You already look like an old man," she said. "Your sons will imagine you're their grandfather." She didn't congratulate him on his victories. "If history had gone down a different path," she said, "then the old gods would still rule, the gods you have defeated, the many-limbed many-headed gods, full of stories and deeds instead of punishments and laws, the gods of being standing beside the goddesses of doing, dancing gods, laughing gods, gods of thunderbolts and flutes, so many, many gods, and maybe that would have been an improvement." She knew she was beautiful and now, dropping her thin silk veil, she unleashed that beauty, and he was lost. "When a boy dreams up a woman, he gives her big breasts and a small brain," she murmured. "When a king imagines a wife, he dreams of me."

She was adept at the seven types of unguiculation, which is to say the art of using the nails to enhance the act of love. Before he left on his long journey, she had marked him with the Three Deep Marks, which were scratches made by the first three fingers of her right hand upon his back and his chest, and on his testicles as well: something to remember her by. Now that he was home, she could make him shudder, could actually make his hair stand on end, by placing her nails on his cheeks and lower lip and chest, without leaving any mark. Or she could mark him, leaving a half-moon shape upon his neck. She could push her nails slowly into his face. She could perform the Hopping of the Hare, marking the areolas around his nipples without touching him anywhere else on his body. And no living woman was as skilled as she at the Peacock's Foot, that delicate maneuver: she placed her thumb on his left nipple and with her four other fingers she "walked" around his breast, digging in her long nails, her curved, clawlike nails, which she had guarded and sharpened in anticipation of this very moment, pushing them into the Emperor's skin until they made marks resembling the trail left by a peacock as it walks through mud. She knew what he would say while she did these things. He would tell her how, in the loneliness of his Army tent, he would close his eyes and imitate her movements, imagine his nails moving on his body to be hers, and be aroused.

She waited for him to say it, but he didn't. Something was different. There was an impatience in him now, an irritation almost, an annoyance she did not understand. It was as if the many sophistications of the lover's art had lost their charms and he wished simply to possess her and be done with it. She understood that he had changed. And now everything else would change as well.

As for the Emperor, he never again referred to himself in the singular in the presence of another person. He was plural in the eyes of the world, plural even in the judgment of the woman who loved him, and plural he would remain. He had learned his lesson. ♦

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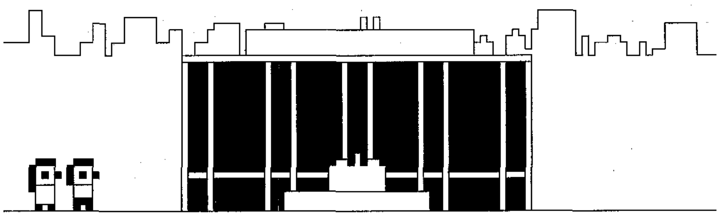


A CRITIC AT LARGE

KILLING JOKE

The Coen brothers' twists and turns.

BY DAVID DENBY

The Coen brothers' "No Country for Old Men" casts an ominous and mournful spell from the first shot. Over scenes of a desolate West Texas landscape, an aging sheriff (Tommy Lee Jones), ruminating on the new viciousness of crime, says that he's not afraid of dying. But, he adds, "I don't want to push my chips forward and go out and meet something I don't understand. A man would have to put his soul at hazard." Without transition, we see Anton Chigurh (Javier Bardem), an odd-looking man in a modified Prince Valiant haircut, murder first a deputy sheriff, then a stranger whose car he needs. (He strangles the deputy and shoots the stranger with some sort of gun attached to what looks like an oxygen tank.) The movie jumps again, to Llewelyn, an early-morning hunter (Josh Brolin) who's out in the desert tracking antelope. In the distance, he sees five pickup trucks arrayed in a rough circle and some dead bodies lying on the ground. He moves in slowly, rifle held low. His attentiveness is so acute that it sharpens our senses, too.

In the past, Joel and Ethan Coen have tossed the camera around like a toy, running it down shiny bowling lanes or flipping it overhead as naked babes, trampolined into the air, rise and fall through the frame in slow motion. Now they've put away such happy shenanigans. The camera work and the editing in the opening scenes of "No Country" are devoted to what the hunter sees and feels as he inches forward: earth, a brush of wind, and the mess in front of him, the remnants of a drug deal gone bad. So powerful are the first twenty minutes or so of "No Country"—so concentrated in their physical and psychological realization of dread—that we are unlikely to ask why Chigurh kills with a captive-bolt gun (the kind used in killing cattle) rather than a revolver, or if it makes any sense for Llewelyn, a likable welder and roughneck, to return to the scene with water for a wounded man after he's made off with two million dollars in drug money. "No Country" is based on Cormac McCarthy's 2005 novel, and the bleak view of life that has always existed in the Coens' work merges with McCarthy's lethal cool. After these initial scenes, Chigurh poses hostile and unanswerable questions to the baffled owner of a roadside gas station (Gene Jones), and the mind games are prolonged to a state of almost unbearable tension. Watching the movie, you feel a little like that gas-station owner—impressed, even intimidated.

That's a strange way to feel at a Coen brothers movie. For almost twenty-five years, the Coens have been rude and funny, inventive and tiresome—in general, so prankish and unsettled that they often seemed in danger of undermining what was best in their movies. Have they gone straight at last?

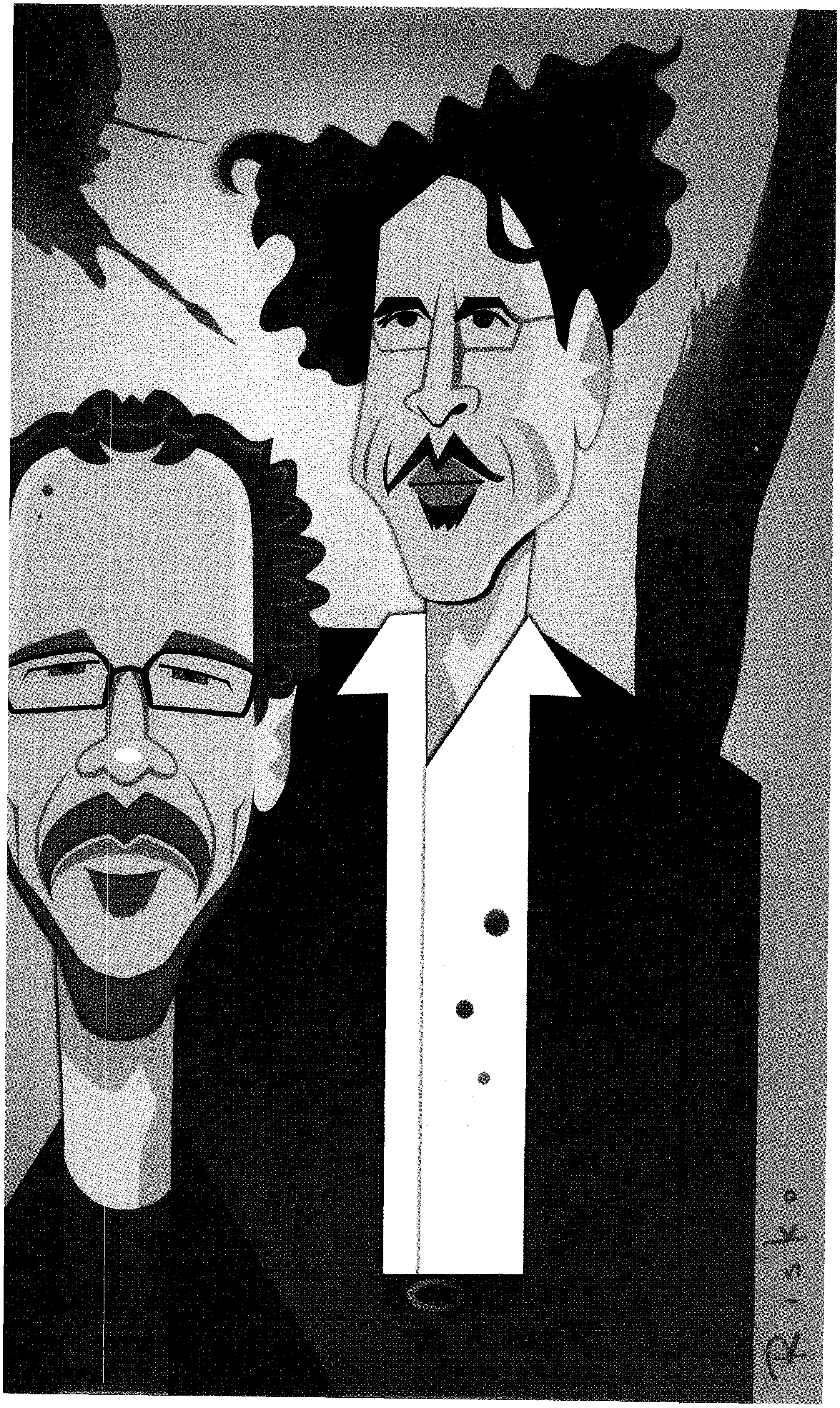
The Coens form a conspiracy of two—industrious, secretive, amused, and seemingly indifferent to both criticism and praise. Early in their careers, they gave detailed interviews, but in recent years they have discussed only specific and relatively trivial matters concerning their movies, avoiding comments on larger meanings or anything approaching a general intellectual outlook. This strategic reticence—the avoidance of art talk—is solidly in the tradition of American movie directors' presenting themselves solely as pragmatic entertainers. But the Coens have gone further into insouciance than any old-time director I can think of. In the opening titles for "Fargo" (1996), they announced that the movie was based on a true story, though it wasn't. "O Brother, Where Art Thou?" (2000) begins with a title stating that the movie is "based upon 'The Odyssey' by Homer," which they later claimed they had never read. From the beginning, they've been playing with moviemaking, playing with the audience, the press, the deep-dish interpreters, disappearing behind a façade of mockery.

Consider a key moment in their first film, "Blood Simple" (1984). Two adulterous lovers, Ray (John Getz) and Abby (Frances McDormand), frightened and at odds with each other, are standing at a screen door. As they talk, we see something flying end over end toward them. It hits the door with a *thwack*, but turns out to be just the morning newspaper. "Blood Simple" is the kind of adultery-and-murder story that James M. Cain would have written in the nineteen-thirties and Hollywood would have made a decade later into a seductive work of cinematic nightshade—the kind of picture that, as James Agee put it, lulled the audience into "a state of semi-amnesia through which tough action and reaction drum with something of the nonsensical solace of hard rain on a tin roof." There's no such solace in "Blood Simple," which was shot not at night in the labyrinthine big city but in the glare of rural Texas.

That *thwack* gave the audience notice that the Coens were going to pull at any rug it might be standing on. For example, the romantic attraction between the lovers, which sets the story in motion, doesn't mean a thing; it's completely without heat. What interests the Coens is how foolishly people behave, and how little they understand of what they're doing. The lovers keep misreading signs, misperceiving what's going on. The

ABOVE: TIBOR KÁRPÁTI; OPPOSITE: ROBERT RISKO

Ethan and Joel Coen. They may be the first major filmmakers since Preston Sturges to exploit the dramatic possibilities of stupidity.


Risko

BRIEFLY NOTED

The Commoner, *by John Burnham Schwartz (Nan A. Talese/Doubleday; $24.95).* In 1959, the Crown Prince of Japan broke with centuries of tradition by taking a commoner as his wife. Schwartz's novel imagines the perspective of the bride, who gives up "the jumbled, striving, visceral world" for a life of airless ritual. Surrounded by viper-tongued ladies-in-waiting appointed by her disapproving mother-in-law and excoriated for such crimes as walking ahead of her husband and breastfeeding her newborn son, she literally loses her voice. Decades later, she is helpless to prevent her son's wife, also a commoner, from "an endless reproductive Olympics" and a public life in which "nothing of consequence would ever be said." Schwartz delivers his tale in unadorned prose, to suit the interiority of his subject—and perhaps to imitate the pared-down elegance of such Japanese writers as Kawabata and Tanizaki—but at times this restraint edges into banality.

Beautiful Children, *by Charles Bock (Random House; $25).* In this ambitious début novel, set on the seedy streets of Las Vegas, an adolescent boy vanishes, his parents' marriage begins to unravel, a comic-book artist contemplates three-dimensional tattoos, and a stripper seeks refuge in imagining her life as a movie. Skillfully working both forward and backward through time, and interlacing the events leading up to the child's disappearance with its aftereffects, Bock aims at humanizing those who exist at the margins. (At the end of the book, he provides a list of agencies that work with runaways.) Yet the book doesn't quite achieve its intended emotional resonance; there is too much shaky dialogue and improbable Vegas kitsch (breast implants with candle-wax-filled nipples, for a pyrotechnic striptease), and the boy at the center of the plot is thinly drawn and so obnoxious that his disappearance is not unwelcome.

The Next Justice, *by Christopher L. Eisgruber (Princeton; $27.95).* What do we want in a Supreme Court Justice, and how should we get it? Eisgruber, a former Supreme Court clerk, argues that the first step is to do away with the idea that the process can or should be entirely divorced from politics. It's not that the justices are pawns of political interests—if anything, the author is generous about their ability to resist such pressures—but that the Constitution traffics in abstractions like "equality" whose meaning depends on one's political world view. Eisgruber's practical recommendations for fixing the confirmation process boil down to having senators stand up for themselves during hearings, unafraid to say no, but his larger point is that, in pursuit of justice, moderation is the paramount virtue; even confirmed liberals and conservatives should, as a rule, prefer a moderate to someone who matches their more radical views.

The Lodger Shakespeare, *by Charles Nicholl (Viking; $26.95).* This entertaining biographical study of Shakespeare takes as its starting point a tantalizing document: the transcript of a 1612 lawsuit, involving his former landlord and a contested dowry, in which Shakespeare testified. Shakespeare apparently encouraged a reluctant young Frenchman to marry the landlord's daughter and performed a lay betrothal ceremony known as "handfasting"—a situation suggestively similar to events in "All's Well That Ends Well." Biographical explanations for literature can be "dangerous," Nicholl notes, but, through imaginative use of primary source material, he culls the "secret flavours of particularity" that distinguished a corner of London at the turn of the seventeenth century, down to the kind of privy that might have been in Shakespeare's house. With lively readings of the plays and a nuanced portrait of their author, he capably captures "the simmering randiness of the age."

Coens may be the first major filmmakers since Preston Sturges to exploit the dramatic possibilities of stupidity. In Sturges's movies, however, you don't feel that the rubes and yokels are being put down. Sturges was an affectionate satirist of gabby democratic vitality, but the Coens can be sardonic, even misanthropic. In their world, stupidity leads to well-deserved disaster. In "Blood Simple," the cuckolded husband (Dan Hedaya) hires a vicious private eye (M. Emmett Walsh) to get rid of his wife and her lover, but the private eye double-crosses the husband, killing him instead, and sets up the lovers to take the fall. He laughs to himself, enjoying what a bad guy he is, but then, chasing Abby, he reaches out of a window and into an adjacent one, only to get his hand tent-pegged to the sill by her knife. The Coens spread dark blood on the floor in a spirit of play. Even fans of the movie (including me) came away feeling a little wounded.

If "Blood Simple" suggested that the Coens didn't want to make a thriller so much as tease one into existence, "Miller's Crossing" (1990) sported with the form in heavier and grimmer ways. The movie is set during Prohibition, in a nameless, sombre-looking city dominated by Irish and Italian gangs. The openly corrupt atmosphere and much of the slang ("What's the rumpus?") come out of Dashiell Hammett's novels "Red Harvest" and "The Glass Key," as does the hero (Gabriel Byrne), a morose, alcoholic, and mysterious loner who plays the gangs off against each other. Shot in sullen browns and greens, "Miller's Crossing" begins as a rapturous Bertoluccian piece of filmmaking, and, with the Gabriel Byrne character front and center, the Coens seem to be saying, or confessing, something about the inability to express feeling. But the situations and the dialogue are so stylized—so manically fretted with crime-genre allusions and tropes—that the Coens killed whatever interest we might have taken in their story or in their hero. Perversely, they invented a new form of failure, acting in bad faith toward themselves.

In the comedy that the Coens made between those two thrillers, they found a style that didn't trip over its own excesses. "Raising Arizona" (1987) has the lilt and shock of a disjointed folk ballad. This tall tale is set in a sun-drenched Arizona whose reddish deserts and magnificent mountains are disfigured by trailer homes and Short Stops—paradise giving way to suburbia. A young married couple—Hi (Nicolas Cage), a semi-retired convenience-store thief, and Ed (Holly Hunter), an ex-cop—decide that, since they cannot have a child of their own, they have the right to snatch one of the quintuplets born to a wealthy couple. This time, the Coens expressed open affection for their lunkheads: Hi and Ed talk in moralistic platitudes culled from the Bible and self-help manuals, and, loving their snatched quint, they desperately want to do what's right—that's the comedy built into their outrageous behavior. Their struggle is accompanied by subdued yodelling and Beethoven's Ninth, played on a banjo.

The Coens' joking is inseparable from topography. In every movie, working first with the cinematographer Barry Sonnenfeld and later with Roger Deakins, they establish a specific landscape, and pull whatever eccentricities they can out of it. In "Arizona," two prison buddies of Hi's show up at the house and steal the baby, but then mistakenly leave him in a car seat along the road. Shrieking with remorse (they, too, have fallen in love with the kid), they drive back for him, and the camera sweeps across the blacktop, as if sliding on an oil slick. The Coens may have been larking again with genre spoof—this time, of the late-sixties road-hog films—but they were the first to think that a tot's point of view might be cooler than a biker's.

These three movies established the emotional and stylistic range of the Coen turf—the flagrancy, the jack-rabbit creativity, and the self-destructive whirl of unhinged pop scholarship. The filmmakers clearly had no interest in ordinary Hollywood realism. They could not tell their stories straight or develop themes; their movies were jangled in style, adolescently skittish in mood, brilliant and flashing but without sensuality or much interest in women. (Holly Hunter and Frances McDormand, who is Joel Coen's wife, play most of the women who show up.) Using a stock company of actors (John Turturro, John Goodman, Steve Buscemi, Jon Polito) who were willing to play meatballs, hysterics, and killers, they made lurid thrillers and screw-loose comedies, all of them shot with a liberated camera that alternated between swooping runs and trancelike fixations on objects dislodged from their context—a hat flying beautifully through the woods in "Miller's Crossing," a pair of dead fish lying atop a Zippo lighter in "Blood Simple." These objects were stuck somewhere between gag and symbol—a symbol without a referent. (Gabriel Byrne's fedora, in "Miller's Crossing," epitomized the décor of thirties gangster movies, but not their meaning.) The movies were skewed genre commentary: surreal parody, offered without irony; spoof that was too unstable to settle into satire. As in a David Letterman routine, derisive quotation marks surrounded the higher sentiments.

"Barton Fink" (1991), for instance, was a bizarrely malicious joke on a left-wing playwright (John Turturro)—Clifford Odets as he might have been imagined by Nathanael West. The Coens portrayed the Odets character as an openmouthed prig and phony who goes to Hollywood in the early forties and sinks into artistic paralysis. As the answer to Fink's lame and literal high-mindedness, the Coens appeared to be offering their own media-hip fluency. They turned the writer's hotel into a flaming, horror-film fantasia out of "The Shining." In "O Brother," three more openmouthed clods (Turturro, George Clooney, and Tim Blake Nelson) horse around in a Depression-era South soaked in myth and legend. The movie is a stunningly uneven mix of cornpone monkeyshines, condescension, and lovely pastoral imagery. Although "O Brother" revived the blues and country music of the period, it scorned such affecting Depression-era classics as "I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang" and "The Grapes of Wrath." The Coens, it seems, are irritated by the earlier naïve strains of earnestness or pathos. You could call them nihilists, if only their subversions were more systematic; or postmodernists, if their fooling weren't so random that it shattered any academic category you could place it in.

Before "No Country," the Coens had never made a movie that grossed more than fifty million dollars domestically, but, for good or ill, they've never given up their aberrant panache, maintaining their independence by writing their own material and by keeping budgets low—sometimes very low. ("Fargo" was made for just seven million dollars.) If some of the movies have been misfires or hodgepodges, there are astonishing passages in many of them, like the Klu Klux Klan musical number in "O Brother." Except for "The Man Who Wasn't There," a dud academic exercise, nothing the Coens did was spiritless, and a little more than a decade ago they stopped banging movie references together and made two harmonious masterpieces in a row, the first a tragic comedy, the second a slacker hymn of praise so gentle and goofy that it has floated off the screen into the fantasy life of the nation.

In "Fargo," the Coens' topographical obsession yields a view of landscape as moral destiny. Despite the title, the movie is set largely in Brainerd, Minnesota, where the snow falls so heavily that the fields and the sky merge into a single blinding mass. Watching the horizon line disappear, one thinks of evil's white body—Melville's white whale and Robert Frost's "dimpled spider, fat and white, on a white heal-all." The movie is about the blurring of the ethical distinctions that people see and live by. The protagonist, Jerry Lundegaard (William H. Macy), who manages a car dealership, is deep in debt and needs more cash for a real-estate scheme. He hires two thugs to kidnap his wife; his wealthy father-in-law, he assumes, will come up with the ransom, which Jerry will use to pay the kidnappers, while keeping the lion's share.

Jerry is the most destructive of the Coens' dopes; the confusion that he unleashes is so violent it comes close to farce. But for once the Coens didn't cross the line, and it turned out to make all the difference. The pace of "Fargo" is deliberate, the tone deadpan, the style a flattening out of realism. The Coens grew up in Minnesota and believed that something strange was going on there—a regional verbal tic that masked a collective nervous breakdown. Jerry's idiocy is a product not just of personal fecklessness but of a way of life in which rampant greed (among other things) gets covered over by an implacable blandness. Committed to politeness and the best of all possible worlds, Jerry has no inkling of his own wickedness—no words to put it in—and not the slightest fear that his idiotic scheme might fail.

The Coens' steady hand in this movie gives stupidity an appalling power. The quiet directorial style takes in not only Jerry's depraved normality but also the brutishness of the two kidnappers (Buscemi and Peter Stormare). The morose Buscemi character protests against the silence of Stormare's dead-eyed killer so frequently that Stormare responds by feeding him into a wood-chipper, an act so casually ghoulish that the only response to it is laughter. The black comedy encompasses even the good folks. The pregnant sheriff, Marge (McDormand), is more shocked by rudeness than by the bloody homicides that she successfully investigates. She and her stolid husband, Norm (John Carroll Lynch), a wildlife artist who paints wooden decoys, demand little; they cuddle together in bed, awaiting their child, far happier than the grasping people outside in the snow. In "Fargo," the comic, violent, and gentle elements in the Coens' temperament achieve a perfect balance.

The surface of their work is often jumpy, even hyperactive, but in "Fargo" they associated goodness with, of all things, a state of rest. That state, and its surprising life-affirming qualities, turns up again in "The Big Lebowski" (1998). The hero, known as the Dude (Jeff Bridges), a waddling Los Angeles mammal in candy-striped shorts, T-shirt, and gray hoodie, gets into all sorts of trouble but wants only to be left alone. "The Big Lebowski" received mediocre reviews and did little initial business, but over the years it has built an effervescent cult following. There are minuscule and profane versions of the film on YouTube, as well as costumes, posters, stickers, and frequent regional stagings of a weekend "Lebowski Fest," at which many White Russians (the Dude's favorite drink) are consumed by young men. The devotion is entirely deserved. As cult movies go, "The Big Lebowski" is much wittier than "Animal House" or "Hairspray," and free of the dumb-bunny silliness of "The Rocky Horror Picture Show" or the fumy mystical pretensions of "El Topo."

The jumping-off point for "The Big Lebowski" is the insolent Howard Hawks classic "The Big Sleep" (1946), but this movie doesn't taunt its model; it mutely reveres it, and finds a rhythm of its own. In the Hawks film, Humphrey Bogart's incomparably adroit Philip Marlowe always anticipates the next moment, whereas the Dude, caught up in an indecipherable Los Angeles intrigue, is so limp and vaguely constituted that he can hardly complete a sentence. He resists being drawn into a story; he wants to spend his time bowling with his irascible friend Walter (John Goodman), a Jewish convert who served in Nam and has become a rhetorically enabled face-down-in-the-mud kind of guy—he thinks the fact that Americans died heroically in Vietnam justifies his getting furious over the smallest incidents in his life. Many of the Coens' idiots are obsessives, but Walter, who has burning eyes and a tight beard outlining a mighty jaw, is so fiercely methodical in his false syllogisms that you begin to understand paranoia as a form of intellectual egotism. "The Big Lebowski" is a tribute to harmlessness, friendship, and team bowling. It offers a persistent "no" to the hard-pressing American "yes." Like "Raising Arizona," it's a ballad held together by tenderness.

But it's not tenderness that impresses audiences in "No Country for Old Men." Stimulated by McCarthy's tough little sentences, which record action and thought but not sentiment, the Coens have hardened their style to a point far beyond what they accomplished in "Fargo." This movie never lets up. Half of the Southwestern drug trade is after Llewelyn and his two million dollars, but they are most seriously pursued by the strangely armed Anton Chigurh. The movie is essentially a game of hide-and-seek, set in brownish, stained motel rooms and other shabby American redoubts, but shot with a formal precision and an economy that make one think of masters like Hitchcock and Bresson. The killer and the money-thief, as played by Bardem and Brolin, are alike in endurance, resourcefulness, and tolerance of pain. We get to know their torn flesh with admiring intimacy. Has there ever been a better chase?

Tommy Lee Jones's sheriff remains on the sidelines (he never really gets into the action of the movie) and continues to make dejected remarks. Civilization, it seems, has come to an end, petering out in the yellow-brown fields of West Texas. But does the story support the sheriff's metaphysical dyspepsia? And have the Coens found, in Anton Chigurh, a correlative for their malign view of life? Who is Chigurh? *What* is he? He slaughters twelve people, and yet somehow manages to be seen by no one. He kills a cop, yet the authorities never get their act together and track him down. The plot, when you parse it from scene to scene, doesn't hang together as a crime story.

Some people have said that you cannot read the movie literally. Chigurh is Death, they say, a supernatural figure, a vengeful ghost. But what do you do with the realistic body of the movie if you read this one element supernaturally? Chigurh, despite Bardem's gravid tones and elocutionary precision, is not Death but a stalking psycho killer out of a grade-C horror movie. You keep wondering when he'll return, like Freddy Krueger. He's a trashy element in the book, too, but McCarthy gave him a shade more reality—he returns the money to the head of the drug syndicate and discusses an ongoing partnership. He murders people, but he wants to continue working in the trade; he's not quite the ineffable spirit of Evil.

The spooky-chic way the Coens use Bardem has excited audiences with a tingling sense of the uncanny. But, in the end, the movie's despair is unearned—it's far too dependent on an arbitrarily manipulated plot and some very old-fashioned junk mechanics. "No Country" is the Coens' most accomplished achievement in craft, with many stunning sequences, but there are absences in it that hollow out the movie's attempt at greatness. If you consider how little the sheriff bestirs himself, his philosophical resignation, however beautifully spoken by Tommy Lee Jones, feels self-pitying, even fake. And the Coens, however faithful to the book, cannot be forgiven for disposing of Llewelyn so casually. After watching this foolhardy but physically gifted and decent guy escape so many traps, we have a great deal invested in him emotionally, and yet he's eliminated, off-camera, by some unknown Mexicans. He doesn't get the dignity of a death scene. The Coens have suppressed their natural jauntiness. They have become orderly, disciplined masters of chaos, but one still has the feeling that, out there on the road from nowhere to nowhere, they are rooting for it rather than against it. ◆

BOOKS

WHAT WAS I THINKING?

The latest reasoning about our irrational ways.

BY ELIZABETH KOLBERT

A couple of months ago, I went online to order a book. The book had a list price of twenty-four dollars; Amazon was offering it for eighteen. I clicked to add it to my "shopping cart" and a message popped up on the screen. "Wait!" it admonished me. "Add $7.00 to your order to qualify for FREE Super Saver Shipping!" I was ordering the book for work; still, I hesitated. I thought about whether there were other books that I might need, or want. I couldn't think of any, so I got up from my desk, went into the living room, and asked my nine-year-old twins. They wanted a Tintin book. Since they already own a large stack of Tintins, it was hard to find one that they didn't have. They scrolled through the possibilities. After much discussion, they picked a three-in-one volume containing two adventures they had previously read. I clicked it into the shopping cart and checked out. By the time I was done, I had saved *The New Yorker* $3.99 in shipping charges. Meanwhile, I had cost myself $12.91.

People make bad decisions, but they make them in systematic ways.

Why do people do things like this? From the perspective of neoclassical economics, self-punishing decisions are difficult to explain. Rational calculators are supposed to consider their options, then pick the one that maximizes the benefit to them. Yet actual economic life, as opposed to the theoretical version, is full of miscalculations, from the gallon jar of mayonnaise purchased at spectacular savings to the billions of dollars Americans will spend this year to service their credit-card debt. The real mystery, it could be argued, isn't why we make so many poor economic choices but why we persist in accepting economic theory.

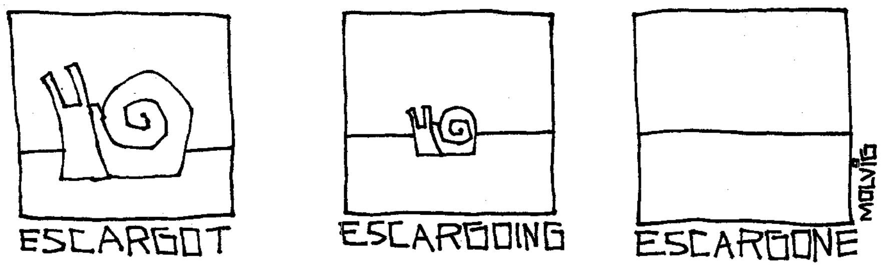
In "Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces That Shape Our Decisions" (Harper; $25.95), Dan Ariely, a professor at M.I.T., offers a taxonomy of financial folly. His approach is empirical rather than historical or theoretical. In pursuit of his research, Ariely has served beer laced with vinegar, left plates full of dollar bills in dorm refrigerators, and asked undergraduates to fill out surveys while masturbating. He claims that his experiments, and others like them, reveal the underlying logic to our illogic. "Our irrational behaviors are neither random nor senseless—they are systematic," he writes. "We all make the same types of mistakes over and over." So attached are we to certain kinds of errors, he contends, that we are incapable even of recognizing them as errors. Offered FREE shipping, we take it, even when it costs us.

As an academic discipline, Ariely's field—behavioral economics—is roughly twenty-five years old. It emerged largely in response to work done in the nineteen-seventies by the Israeli-American psychologists Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman. (Ariely, too, grew up in Israel.) When they examined how people deal with uncertainty, Tversky and Kahneman found that there were consistent biases to the responses, and that these biases could be traced to mental shortcuts, or what they called "heuristics." Some of these heuristics were pretty obvious—people tend to make inferences from their own experiences, so if they've recently seen a traffic accident they will overestimate the danger of dying in a car crash—but others were more surprising, even downright wacky. For instance, Tversky and Kahneman asked subjects to estimate what proportion of African nations were members of the United Nations. They discovered that they could influence the subjects' responses by spinning a wheel of fortune in front of them to generate a random number: when a big number turned up, the estimates suddenly swelled.

Though Tversky and Kahneman's research had no direct bearing on economics, its implications for the field were disruptive. Can you really regard people as rational calculators if their decisions are influenced by random numbers? (In 2002, Kahneman was awarded a Nobel Prize—Tversky had died in 1996—for having "integrated insights from psychology into economics, thereby laying the foundation for a new field of research.")

Over the years, Tversky and Kahneman's initial discoveries have been confirmed and extended in dozens of experiments. In one example, Ariely and a colleague asked students at M.I.T.'s Sloan

SEYMOUR CHWAST



School of Management to write the last two digits of their Social Security number at the top of a piece of paper. They then told the students to record, on the same paper, whether they would be willing to pay that many dollars for a fancy bottle of wine, a not-so-fancy bottle of wine, a book, or a box of chocolates. Finally, the students were told to write down the maximum figure they would be willing to spend for each item. Once they had finished, Ariely asked them whether they thought that their Social Security numbers had had any influence on their bids. The students dismissed this idea, but when Ariely tabulated the results he found that they were kidding themselves. The students whose Social Security number ended with the lowest figures—00 to 19—were the lowest bidders. For all the items combined, they were willing to offer, on average, sixty-seven dollars. The students in the second-lowest group—20 to 39—were somewhat more free-spending, offering, on average, a hundred and two dollars. The pattern continued up to the highest group—80 to 99—whose members were willing to spend an average of a hundred and ninety-eight dollars, or three times as much as those in the lowest group, for the same items.

This effect is called "anchoring," and, as Ariely points out, it punches a pretty big hole in microeconomics. When you walk into Starbucks, the prices on the board are supposed to have been determined by the supply of, say, Double Chocolaty Frappuccinos, on the one hand, and the demand for them, on the other. But what if the numbers on the board are influencing your sense of what a Double Chocolaty Frappuccino is worth? In that case, price is not being determined by the interplay of supply and demand; price is, in a sense, determining itself.

Another challenge to standard economic thinking arises from what has become known as the "endowment effect." To probe this effect, Ariely, who earned one of his two Ph.D.s at Duke, exploited the school's passion for basketball. Blue Devils fans who had just won tickets to a big game through a lottery were asked the minimum amount that they would accept in exchange for them. Fans who had failed to win tickets through the same lottery were asked the maximum amount that they would be willing to offer for them.

"From a rational perspective, both the ticket holders and the non-ticket holders should have thought of the game in exactly the same way," Ariely observes. Thus, one might have expected that there would be opportunities for some of the lucky and some of the unlucky to strike deals. But whether or not a lottery entrant had been "endowed" with a ticket turned out to powerfully affect his or her sense of its value. One of the winners Ariely contacted, identified only as Joseph, said that he wouldn't sell his ticket for any price. "Everyone has a price," Ariely claims to have told him. O.K., Joseph responded, how about three grand? On average, the amount that winners were willing to accept for their tickets was twenty-four hundred dollars. On average, the amount that losers were willing to offer was only a hundred and seventy-five dollars. Out of a hundred fans, Ariely reports, not a single ticket holder would sell for a price that a non-ticket holder would pay.

Whatever else it accomplishes, "Predictably Irrational" demonstrates that behavioral economists are willing to experiment on just about anybody. One of the more compelling studies described in the book involved trick-or-treaters. A few Halloweens ago, Ariely laid in a supply of Hershey's Kisses and two kinds of Snickers—regular two-ounce bars and one-ounce miniatures. When the first children came to his door, he handed each of them three Kisses, then offered to make a deal. If they wanted to, the kids could trade one Kiss for a mini-Snickers or two Kisses for a full-sized bar. Almost all of them took the deal and, proving their skills as sugar maximizers, opted for the two-Kiss trade. At some point, Ariely shifted the terms: kids could now trade one of their three Kisses for the larger bar or get a mini-Snickers without giving up anything. In terms of sheer chocolatiness, the trade for the larger bar was still by far the better deal. But, faced with the prospect of getting a mini-Snickers for nothing, the trick-or-treaters could no longer reckon properly. Most of them refused the trade, even though it cost them candy. Ariely speculates that behind the kids' miscalculation was anxiety. As he puts it, "There's no visible possibility of loss when we choose a FREE! item (it's free)." Tellingly, when Ariely performed a similar experiment on adults, they made the same mistake. "If I were to distill one main lesson from the research described in this book, it is that we are all pawns in a game whose forces we largely fail to comprehend," he writes.

A few weeks ago, the Bureau of Economic Analysis released its figures for 2007. They showed that Americans had collectively amassed ten trillion one hundred and eighty-four billion dollars in disposable income and spent very nearly all of it—ten trillion one hundred and thirty-two billion dollars. This rate of spending was somewhat lower than the rate in 2006, when Americans spent all but thirty-nine billion dollars of their total disposable income.

According to standard economic theory, the U.S. savings rate also represents rational choice: Americans, having reviewed their options, have collectively resolved to spend virtually all the money that they have. According to behavioral economists, the low savings rate has a more immediate explanation: it proves—yet again—that people have trouble acting in their own best interests. It's worth noting that Americans, even as they continue to spend, say that they should be putting more money away; one study of participants in 401(k) plans found that more than two-thirds believed their savings rate to be "too low."

In the forthcoming "Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness" (Yale; $25), Richard H. Thaler and Cass R. Sunstein follow behavioral economics out of the realm of experiment and into the realm of social policy. Thaler and Sunstein both teach at the University of Chicago, Thaler in the graduate school of business and Sunstein at the law school. They share with Ariely the belief that, faced with certain options, people will consistently make the wrong choice. Therefore, they argue, people should be offered options that work with, rather than against, their unreasoning tendencies. These foolish-proof choices they label "nudges." (A "nudge," they note with scholarly care, should not be confused with a "noodge.")

A typical "nudge" is a scheme that Thaler and Sunstein call "Save More Tomorrow." One of the reasons people have such a hard time putting money away, the authors say, is that they are loss-averse. They are pained by any reduction in their take-home pay—even when it's going toward their own retirement. Under "Save More Tomorrow," employees commit to contributing a greater proportion of their paychecks to their retirement over time, but the increases are scheduled to coincide with their annual raises, so their paychecks never shrink. (The "Save More Tomorrow" scheme was developed by Thaler and the U.C.L.A. economist Shlomo Benartzi, back in 1996, and has already been implemented by several thousand retirement plans.)

People aren't just loss-averse; they are also effort-averse. They hate having to go to the benefits office, pick up a bunch of forms, fill them out, and bring them all the way back. As a consequence, many eligible employees fail to enroll in their companies' retirement plans, or delay doing so for years. (This is the case, research has shown, even at companies where no employee contribution is required.) Thaler and Sunstein propose putting this sort of inertia to use by inverting the choice that's presented. Instead of having to make the trip to the benefits office to opt in, employees should have to make that trip only if they want to opt out. The same basic argument holds whenever a so-called default option is provided. For instance, most states in the U.S. require that those who want to become organ donors register their consent; in this way, many potential donors are lost. An alternative—used, for example, in Austria—is to make consent the default option, and put the burden of registering on those who do not wish to be donors. (It has been estimated that if every state in the U.S. simply switched from an "explicit consent" to a "presumed consent" system several thousand lives would be saved each year.)

"Nudges" could also involve disclosure requirements. To discourage credit-card debt, for instance, Thaler and Sunstein recommend that cardholders receive annual statements detailing how much they have already squandered in late fees and interest. To encourage energy conservation, they propose that new cars come with stickers showing how many dollars' worth of gasoline they are likely to burn through in five years of driving.

Many of the suggestions in "Nudge" seem like good ideas, and even, as with "Save More Tomorrow," practical ones. The whole project, though, as Thaler and Sunstein acknowledge, raises some pretty awkward questions. If the "nudgee" can't be depended on to recognize his own best interests, why stop at a nudge? Why not offer a "push," or perhaps even a "shove"? And if people can't be trusted to make the right choices for themselves how can they possibly be trusted to make the right decisions for the rest of us?

Like neoclassical economics, much democratic theory rests on the assumption that people are rational. Here, too, empirical evidence suggests otherwise. Voters, it has been demonstrated, are influenced by factors ranging from how names are placed on a ballot to the jut of a politician's jaw. A 2004 study of New York City primary-election results put the advantage of being listed first on the ballot for a local office at more than three per cent—enough of a boost to turn many races. (For statewide office, the advantage was around two per cent.) A 2005 study, conducted by psychologists at Princeton, showed that it was possible to predict the results of congressional contests by using photographs. Researchers presented subjects with fleeting images of candidates' faces. Those candidates who, in the subjects' opinion, looked more "competent" won about seventy per cent of the time.

When it comes to public-policy decisions, people exhibit curious—but, once again, predictable—biases. They value a service (say, upgrading fire equipment) more when it is described in isolation than when it is presented as part of a larger good (say, improving disaster preparedness). They are keen on tax "bonuses" but dislike tax "penalties," even though the two are functionally equivalent. They are more inclined to favor a public policy when it is labelled the status quo. In assessing a policy's benefits, they tend to ignore whole orders of magnitude. In an experiment demonstrating this last effect, sometimes called "scope insensitivity," subjects were told that migrating birds were drowning in ponds of oil. They were then asked how much they would pay to prevent the deaths by erecting nets. To save two thousand birds, the subjects were willing to pay, on average, eighty dollars. To save twenty thousand birds, they were willing to pay only seventy-eight dollars, and to save two hundred thousand birds they were willing to pay eighty-eight dollars.

What is to be done with information like this? We can try to become more aware of the patterns governing our blunders, as "Predictably Irrational" urges. Or we can try to prod people toward more rational choices, as "Nudge" suggests. But if we really are wired to make certain kinds of mistakes, as Thaler and Sunstein and Ariely all argue, we will, it seems safe to predict, keep finding new ways to make them. (Ariely confesses that he recently bought a thirty-thousand-dollar car after reading an ad offering FREE oil changes for the next three years.)

If there is any consolation to take from behavioral economics—and this impulse itself probably counts as irrational—it is that irrationality is not always altogether a bad thing. What we most value in other people, after all, has little to do with the values of economics. (Who wants a friend or a lover who is too precise a calculator?) Some of the same experiments that demonstrate people's weak-mindedness also reveal, to use a quaint term, their humanity. One study that Ariely relates explored people's willingness to perform a task for different levels of compensation. Subjects were willing to help out—moving a couch, performing a tedious exercise on a computer—when they were offered a reasonable wage. When they were offered less, they were less likely to make an effort, but when they were asked to contribute their labor for nothing they started trying again. People, it turns out, want to be generous and they want to retain their dignity—even when it doesn't really make sense. ♦

THE THEATRE

THREE SISTERS

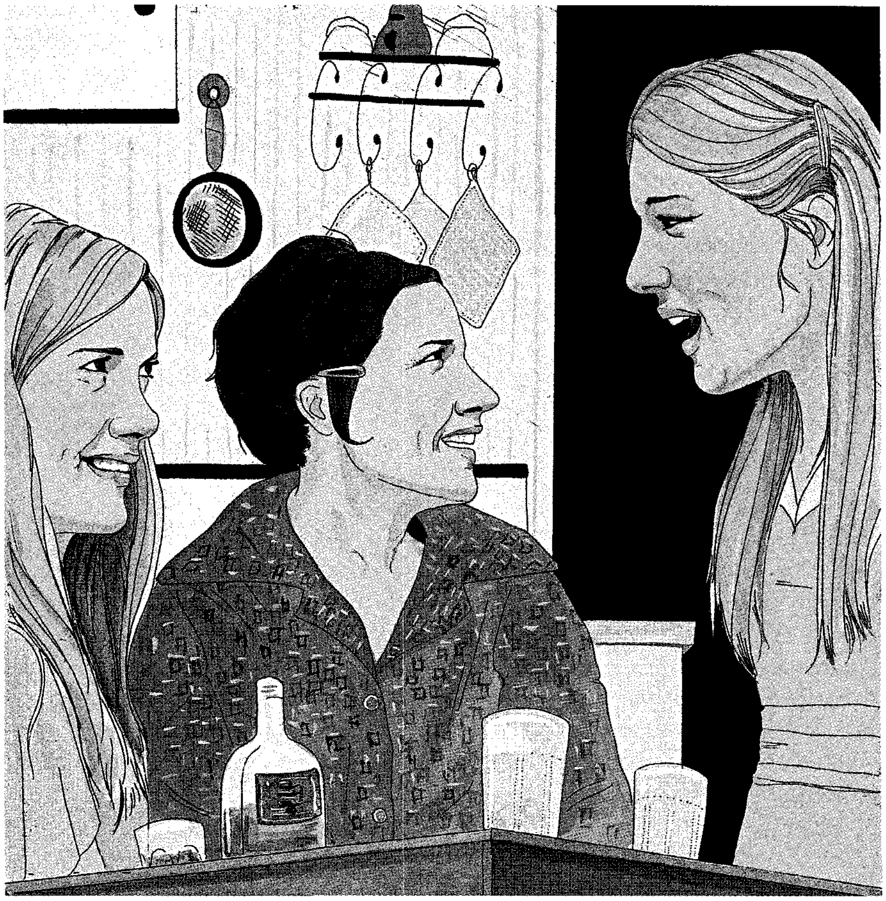
A new production of "Crimes of the Heart."

BY HILTON ALS

The playwright Beth Henley was born in Jackson, Mississippi, in 1952, and she has been working steadily since the late nineteen-seventies. In play after play, and in several film scripts (she co-authored the musician David Byrne's 1986 directorial début, "True Stories"), we have been given the sense of a writer drunk on the scent of stale magnolia, one who has a reverence for lesser Southern dramatists such as Lillian Hellman or Carson McCullers. Henley's characters are lost and eccentric, women familiar from the roster of the Southern gothic, but her work lacks the bravery of writers who have mined similar territory to sharper effect: the West Virginia-born short-story writer Jayne Anne Phillips, for example, whose tales about drifters and speed freaks are capable of vulgarity and ugliness—and much greater emotional reach. Instead, Henley prefers to hide behind the frou-frou one hears in her characters' Fannie Flagg-sounding whoops and hollers and sobs. As her characters talk in circles, skittering around the bowls of their consciousness, you might wonder what they and Henley are avoiding. Real thinking?

The current revival of Henley's 1981 Pulitzer Prize-winning play, "Crimes of the Heart" (a Roundabout Theatre production, at the Laura Pels), showcases her idiosyncrasies as a writer. In Henley's plays, there's much talk about the past, one reason being that her characters don't have much of a future. Her work is rarely propulsive—little moves forward, including her characters' ideas about the world. But that's O.K. Henley is essentially a portraitist; the stories that interest her are embedded in the carefully constructed monologues that her characters speak while they're eating a bowl of oatmeal, or gluing a broken heel to a boot. Under Kathleen Turner's direction, the production makes clear just how seductive the writer's Southern-fried world is to actors: Henley provides enough subtext for her characters to seem complicated, and just enough wackiness to allow an actor to show off.

The action begins in the fall of 1974, in the cozy kitchen of the Magrath sisters' house, in Hazelhurst, Mississippi. (The realistic set, by Anna Louizos, is beautifully lit by Natasha Katz.) It's the afternoon of Lenny's thirtieth birthday—an occasion she's prepared to mark on her own. Lenny (Jennifer Dundas) is small, with dark hair. She makes quick, decisive gestures. The eldest of the three Magrath sisters, Lenny has been taking care of the girls' grandfather for quite some time. Now that he's failing and in the local hospital, Lenny's brows are permanently knitted. She's baffled by her life, and we're baffled for her. Who or what can save her drowning soul? One of her out-to-lunch sisters?



The Magrath women: Sarah Paulson, Jennifer Dundas, and Lily Rabe.

LARA TOMLIN

In the midst of a crisis, the members of this all-female clan gather together. The youngest sister, Babe (Lily Rabe), has shot her loutish husband in the stomach and is now released on bail. Meanwhile, Lenny has sent a frantic telegram to their middle sister, Meg (Sarah Paulson), in Los Angeles, pleading with her to come home. Somewhat to Lenny's surprise, Meg turns up. She enters the memory-clogged kitchen, her hair streaked with blond, walking like a tall, rangy boy: you get the feeling that she has spent a fair amount of time with male session musicians while pursuing her dream of becoming a singer. Paulson is an exceptionally gifted performer. She anchors whatever production she's in with a kind of reasonableness that most actors shrink from—what's the point of acting sensible when you want to shine and sparkle?—and commands our attention because she is not afraid to ask for it. Dressed in form-fitting jeans, knocking back a whiskey and smoking a cigarette, her mere presence is suggestive of a wider world.

Of the three sisters, Babe is the most conventionally pretty; her creamy skin has an oleo gleam. But there's something a little off about her, too. When she tells a story, she's liable to drift, and she has a babyish habit of seizing on all the wrong details. When asked why she shot her husband, at first she says only, "I didn't like his looks." Later, she describes for her lawyer, Barnette Lloyd (the funny and sexy Chandler Williams), the episode's strange aftermath. After pulling the trigger, she says, she was "dying of thirst." She went into the kitchen to make a pitcher of lemonade. Barnette, smitten with his little girl of a client, patiently coaxes the rest of the story from her:

> Babe: Then I called out to Zackery. I said, "Zackery, I've made some lemonade. Can you use a glass?"
>
> Barnette: Did he answer? Did you hear an answer?
>
> Babe: No, he didn't answer.
>
> Barnette: So, what'd you do?
>
> Babe: I poured him a glass anyway and took it out to him.
>
> Barnette: You took it out to the living room?
>
> Babe: I did. And there he was; lying on the rug. He was looking up at me trying to speak words. I said, "What? . . . Lemonade? . . . You don't want it? Would you like a Coke instead?" Then I got the idea, he was telling me to call on the phone for medical help. So I got on the phone and called up the hospital. I gave my name and address and I told them my husband was shot and he was lying on the rug and there was plenty of blood. . . .

Babe is reluctant to reveal the real reason behind the shooting, but eventually she confesses to Meg that she is protecting someone—a young black boy named Willie Jay. Willie is fifteen years old, and the doting owner of a dog he calls Dog. ("I liked the name," Babe tells her sister wistfully.) After finding out that Willie Jay's family couldn't afford to keep Dog, Babe agreed to take him in, and then she and Willie became lovers. (Meg: "I didn't even know you were a liberal.") In the midst of her lawyer's preparations, Babe's husband (still recovering from his wounds) produces graphic photographs, snapped by a private detective, of the two lovers together, so Barnette arranges for Willie Jay to be sent away.

All of the Magrath sisters are haunted by the suicide of their mother, who killed herself when they were young, and who also killed the beloved family cat. (At one point, Babe observes ruefully, "I bet if she hadn't have hung that old cat along with her, she wouldn't have gotten all that national coverage.") Despondent over the loss of her lover, Babe tries—and fails—to kill herself: the rope breaks, and then she bangs her head trying to stick it in the oven. Eventually, Babe realizes that what Meg has said about their mother's taking her own life—"She had a bad day. A real bad day"—is true for her, too. And Babe has another revelation: her mama hung the cat first because she didn't want to die alone.

The sisters each deal with their existential aches, their loneliness, in different ways—none of them especially effective, until, in the play's final moments, we see the sisters eating birthday cake together, like children, once more living in a fairy tale, splattered with icing. The world at large—the world of politics, and cruelty outside of the kitchen—rarely seeps into Henley's slightly sour ambrosia of corny scenes and stock characters, which is a pity. Henley's work gently mocks the casual racism and ridiculous social conventions of the post-civil-rights South, but her tics have kept her from becoming a writer of real depth and fullness. All too often, producers and directors have indulged her penchant for characters whose cuteness masks the fact that they're shallow.

Turner's direction manages to bring out some of the play's subtler beats and moments—a level of quiet that the glamorous women who starred in the 1986 film version (Diane Keaton, Sissy Spacek, and Jessica Lange) trampled over in their ambition to look good while playing kooky. Turner doesn't noodle around with the play, and the performances she elicits from her actors feel intuitive. It's a testament to the veteran actress's skill as a director (and this is Turner's first time on the other side of the apron in a New York production) that the greatest pleasure to be had here is in her casting: the performers so relish their parts that they make you happy about acting as an art. Still, by the end of this inconsequential and too-long play, you can't help but wish that all that craft and experience had been applied in service of something more worthwhile. ♦

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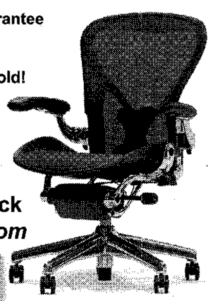

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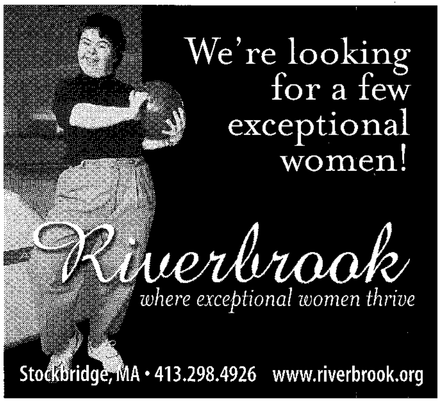

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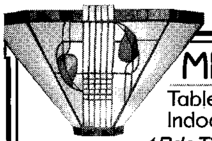

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THE ART WORLD

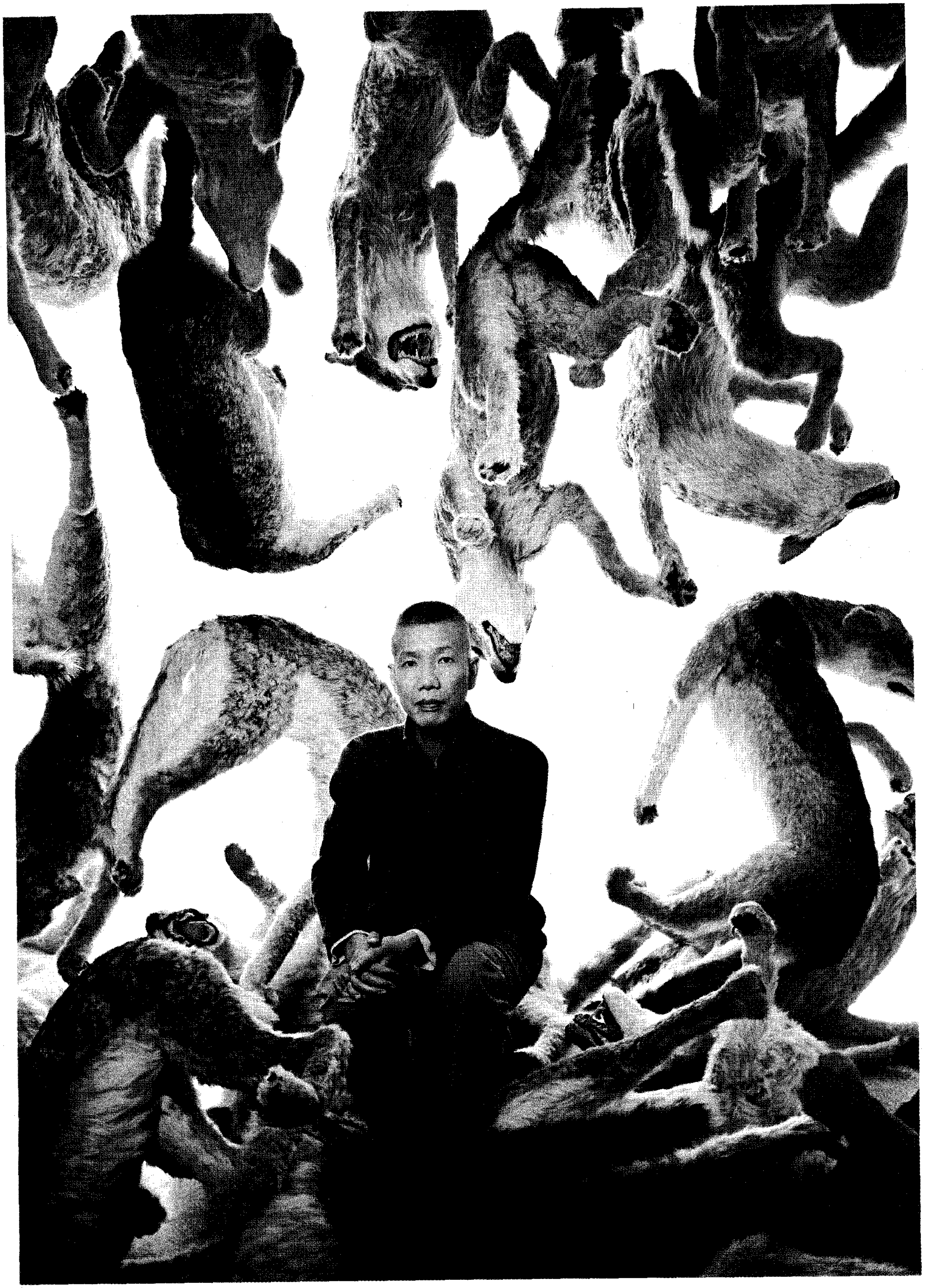
GUNPOWDER PLOTS

Cai Guo-Qiang at the Guggenheim.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

Cai Guo-Qiang, the Chinese installation and pyrotechnic artist, recently told me that as a child he had a recurrent dream of a fireworks display in Tiananmen Square at which no one was present—no crew, no audience—except him. Keep that in mind while viewing Cai's retrospective at the Guggenheim. It might tip the balance of your feelings in his favor, as it did mine. A whiff of eccentric passion complicates the character of his art, which is strenuously theatrical and weirdly political (with ambiguous stands on Mao Zedong and terrorism), calculated in content (East-West tropes are a specialty), and ad hoc in form. It also disarms my prejudice against that sort of work, as being a product more of institutional programs—biennials, inevitably—than of plausible human interests and desires. Cai, who is fifty and has had a studio in New York since 1995, is one of several international art stars—others are Olafur Eliasson, Rirkrit Tiravanija, and, as a grandfathery pioneer, Christo—whose personal wealth likely includes epic accumulations of frequent-flyer miles. He is in charge of the visual and special effects for the opening and closing ceremonies at the Beijing Olympics, and he has installed works and orchestrated events—usually explosive ones—in dozens of cities, from Tokyo, where he lived from 1986 to 1995, after leaving China, to Santa Fe. Such artists belong less to an art world than to a travelling art circus, with no coherent audience and thus scant purchase for critical discussion. They reduce us all to random faces in crowds of strangers. Is there value in that? There's truth. Globalization, cultural as well as economic, has advanced beyond transcending former centers to discountenancing them. Cai negotiates this boundaryless condition with comfort and élan.

Here is some of what you will behold at the Guggenheim—besides many drawings made with ignited gunpowder, which suggest blurry, brown scroll paintings—and what the catalogue says it signifies: "Borrowing Your Enemy's Arrows" (1998), the excavated hulk of an old fishing boat that bristles with some three thousand arrows and flies the Chinese flag. Inspired by the legend of a general who replenished his army's ammunition by drawing fire to dummy soldiers, it "examines the dynamics of China's emergence as an international leader." It's quite grand. "New York's Rent Collection Courtyard" is the on-site, temporary re-creation (repeating one that earned Cai the International Award of the Venice Biennale in 1999), in clay, by ten Chinese artists, of a vast socialist-realist sculptural tableau, from 1965. Cai intends "to bring the tradition of figurative sculpture into the arena of contemporary art, while also commenting on the fate of art under the manipulation of political ideology." Both historically and aesthetically, there's a necrophilic feel to "Courtyard"—and a fascination. "An Arbitrary History: River" (2001) is a serpentine, watertight bamboo trough in which one viewer at a time may pilot a rawhide boat past assorted works by Cai. Among other things, these works refer "to the healing power of acupuncture," symbolize "the marginalization of world religions," and evoke the artist's "youthful romanticization of Mao." (One piece incorporates live snakes, another live canaries.) "Inopportune: Stage One," a revision of a 2004 work, features nine white Chevrolet Metros—six are suspended willy-nilly in the Guggenheim's atrium, two are on the floor, and one is high on the ramp—pierced with flashing electric light rods. It relates "to acts of terrorism"—car bombs, obviously—"offering up the contradiction between a spectator's abhorrence of violence and attraction to the abstract beauty of some violent images." The choice of American cars seems satirical, suggesting a tour-



Cai with part of "Head On" (2006), an installation of ninety-nine life-size wolf sculptures. Photograph by Ethan Levitas.

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THE MENU

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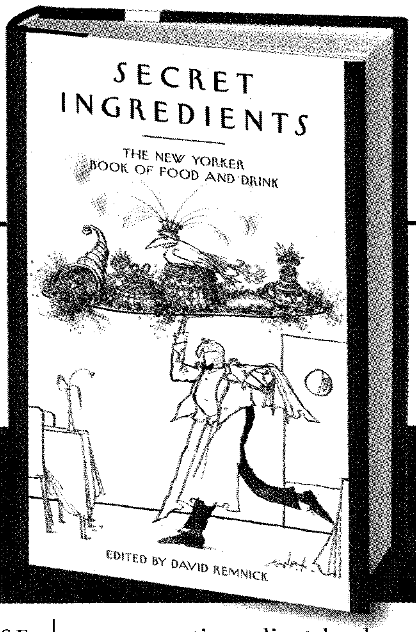

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ist's patronizing enthusiasm for quaint native handicraft.

Talking with Cai, an elegant and pleasant man, gave me a feeling that I've got used to in international art circles lately: that of being provincial, of blinking in the face of an intricate sophistication that is grounded elsewhere. After thirteen years in New York, Cai still uses a Chinese interpreter, and he is disconcertingly serene when discussing the Cultural Revolution, which he experienced in privileged circumstances. In the relatively unroiled port town of Quanzhou, on the Taiwan Strait, his father, a Communist Party member, worked at a bookstore and provided officials—and his son—with banned books. An amateur artist (a handsome scroll painting by him hangs in the show), he initiated Cai into traditional Chinese landscape painting and calligraphy. Cai remembers reading "Death of a Salesman" and "Waiting for Godot" at a time when most books other than Mao's little red one were in bad odor. He participated in propaganda activities while evading *xiaxiang*, the forced dispersal of urban intellectuals to rural areas. (Having studied stage design, Cai managed to obtain a student visa to Japan, with help from a well-connected friend, and he launched his career there.)

Cai remains sanguine about the Maoist slogan "to revolt is justified," meaning, in his words, quoted in the catalogue, "Anything that disrupts the usual and consensual rule or law is considered good." Maoism, he says, "seeped into my mentality, consciously and unconsciously." Nor is he defensive about indulging aesthetically contemplative viewpoints on terrorism—as in producing a fun spectacle about car bombs. He strikes me as innocent of political animus; his detachment seems broadly philosophical—Taoist, more or less. Cai has made works addressed, he declares, to extraterrestrials, and there is about him something of the impassive visitor from another world.

No actual fireworks (which have been part of Cai's life since his childhood) will attend the retrospective—only videos of past performances. (My favorite involves a house that Cai constructed in Berlin in 2006 and then artfully exploded and burned; the effect is an exquisite balance of fearsomeness and beauty.) He is the innovative master of a medium—the art of making nothing out of something, suddenly—that is far more interesting than anything that monotonously ooh-ah commercial fireworks displays allow. Cai proves the creative potency of horizontally oriented sequential explosions, along the ground or, in one case, across an expanse of sea. He has developed a poetry of daytime displays, with tight puffs of black smoke. He understands gunpowder as Velázquez understood oil paint. "There is an instant of suspension" when fire reaches an explosive core, he has noted. "It is a very blank and quiet moment." Cai has ticked off the emotional effects proper to fireworks: "connections to the cosmos, nature, society, glory, and heroic sensation." He objectifies those thrills, in consciousness, even as he triggers them. The payoff is philosophical indeed, giving concrete reference to abstract thought on meanings of destruction. "No destruction, no construction," Cai told me, paraphrasing Mao. That's a dicey sentiment, considering the tyrannical source. Filtered through Cai, however, it evokes a state of mind capacious enough to smile benignly upon every possible contradiction.

In China, collaborating with the Olympics has been denounced by another star artist, Ai Weiwei, a fitfully brilliant conceptualist in many mediums, who worked with the Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron on the design of the dazzling "bird's nest" stadium, before withdrawing from the project in protest against Communist Party policies. Ai, who grew up in a reëducation camp in northwest China, to which his poet father had been banished, is a firebrand for democracy whose frequent provocations include countering the 2000 Shanghai Biennial with an exhibition not altogether subtly entitled "Fuck Off." His public profile in China is kept low by censorship, but apparently without check to his career as an artist. Cai, who seems to move smoothly between officialdom and the avant-garde, has declined to comment on Ai's position. How much do we not yet understand about Chinese internal politics? How high is the sky? ♦

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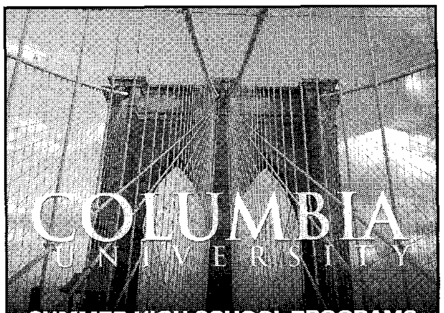
More art by Cai Guo-Qiang.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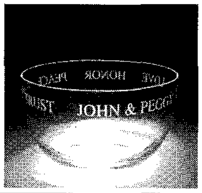
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MUSICAL EVENTS

INEXTINGUISHABLE

The fiery rhythms of Carl Nielsen.

BY ALEX ROSS

The great Danish composer Carl Nielsen once imagined that music had a voice, and that it spoke in these terms: “I live tenfold more intensely than any living thing, and die a thousandfold deeper. I love the vast surface of silence; and it is my chief delight to break it.” True to that eloquent boast, Nielsen's works often begin with pure musical action, suggestive of bodies in motion and of forces unleashed. The First Symphony, from 1892, starts with a pair of curt chords, bright C major and darker-hued G minor, which land on the ears like a one-two punch. The Third, from two decades later, begins with the note A blasting repeatedly in various registers and accelerating until a takeoff tempo is achieved. The Fourth, subtitled “The Inextinguishable,” written during the First World War, is a melee from the first measure; the Fifth, from the early twenties, emerges from silence with an eerily oscillating interval, then builds to an anarchic climax in which a snare drum improvises against the orchestral mass. With these bolt-from-the-blue beginnings, Nielsen was undoubtedly modelling himself on the ultimate symphonic forebear, the Beethoven of the “Eroica” and the Fifth. Nielsen's music seldom resembles Beethoven's directly, but it weighs in with the same brute strength.

Conductors are rediscovering the music of Nielsen, a Danish composer whose symphonies have the brute strength of Beethoven's.

Given the blazing individuality of Nielsen's voice, it's puzzling that he has yet to find a firm place in the international repertory. He is ubiquitous in his native Denmark, where he holds the place of National Composer-Hero; he is a mainstay throughout the Nordic countries and, to a lesser extent, in Britain. For American orchestras, however, he remains a tough sell, despite periodic attempts to whip up the same enthusiasm that has long attended his contemporaries Mahler and Sibelius. Leonard Bernstein tried to set off a Nielsen fad at the New York Philharmonic in the nineteen-sixties, but it didn't quite take. Orchestral players, percussionists excepted, tend to groan a little when Nielsen shows up on their music stands; his habit of writing furiously fast figures, and then passing them from one section to another, relay style, can make even an ensemble of virtuosos sound like a mess. Audiences, for their part, often go away from Nielsen performances pleased but a little dazed, not sure what hit them.

Lately, though, Nielsen has been gaining ground, as notable younger conductors join longtime advocates like

Herbert Blomstedt and Simon Rattle in preaching his virtues. Paavo Järvi, the music director of the Cincinnati Symphony, has made a strong recording of the Fifth, pointedly pairing it with Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring." Gustavo Dudamel also recently conducted the Fifth at the Gothenburg Symphony. And, earlier this month, Alan Gilbert delivered a miniature manifesto by presenting two Nielsen symphonies back to back—the Second, with the Philadelphia Orchestra, and the Third, with the orchestra of the Curtis Institute of Music. Gilbert's efforts are of particular interest because the conductor will become the music director of the New York Philharmonic in the fall of 2009. From that historic perch, Gilbert might be able to complete the job that Bernstein left unfinished, and make Nielsen famous in a city that already moves to his helter-skelter tempo.

Nielsen, who was born in 1865, grew up in a poor but happy home on Funen, Denmark's second-largest island. He worked variously as a gooseherder, a cowherd, a wedding musician, and a military bugler before winning a scholarship to the Royal Danish Conservatory, in Copenhagen. His major pieces—which include not only the six symphonies but the operas "Saul and David" and "Maskarade," a beloved Wind Quintet, and concertos for violin, flute, and clarinet—are grounded in ruddy, earthy, insistently singable melodies; more than a few of his songs have entered Danish folk tradition. (When the composer turned sixty, in 1925, a national holiday was declared, and he woke to find a brass band playing outside his window in Copenhagen.)

With savage concentration, Nielsen proceeds to hack apart, reshape, mash together, and rev up his catchy little tunes. In this respect, he resembles Charles Ives, the master of musical collisions, and, more distantly, the neoclassical Stravinsky. He is at his most daring in the Sixth Symphony, which is almost an act of compositional surrealism: naïve pastoral melodies disintegrate, dissonances unnerve like midnight alarms, waltzes are interrupted in wild polyrhythmic episodes, trombones and tuba issue mocking bleats, the percussion rattles around with sinister glee. At times, the work is positively morbid in tone—the late British composer Robert Simpson, a Nielsen devotee, thought that the piercing discords in the first movement were depictions of heart attacks that Nielsen had lately suffered—but the symphony fights its way to a bracingly comical, carnivalesque conclusion, ending on a Bronx cheer of a bassoon note. As in the case of Janáček and Bartók, the other leading folk-modernists of the early twentieth century, Nielsen seamlessly fused his "peasant" and "urban" selves. His habit of flattening the third and seventh notes of the major scale harks back to folk modes, yet it also allows for rapid-fire modulations and polymorphous key schemes.

Players need to believe fervently in this music if they are to bring it fully to life. Each phrase must trigger the next in a kind of chain reaction. The difference is clear when you go from, say, the Berlin Philharmonic's solemn, square-footed 1981 recording of the Fourth Symphony, under the direction of Herbert von Karajan, to a series of live recordings that the Danish Radio Symphony Orchestra made in the nineteen-fifties. The conductors—Thomas Jensen, Launy Grøndahl, Erik Tuxen—aren't household names, but they elicit playing of reckless passion. (The disks appear on the Danacord label and are available through ArkivMusic.com or Amazon download. There is also an outstanding CD of the Second and the Fourth on RCA, with Jean Martinon and Morton Gould conducting the Chicago Symphony.) Jensen's reading of the Fourth is simply one of the most viscerally exciting orchestral recordings ever made. During the timpani duel in the finale, a kind of animal frenzy takes over, the entire orchestra seemingly possessed by the composer's personal motto: "Music is life, and, like life, inextinguishable."

American orchestral players might have to live for a month in one-room Danish cottages to enter fully into the spirit of Nielsen's music. But Alan Gilbert demonstrates that it's possible to obtain arrestingly idiomatic performances after a few days of rehearsal. The first qualification that this conductor brings to bear is the flexible precision of his beat; he indicates tempi with uncommon clarity, yet is hardly metronomic in his approach. His rhythmic mastery was apparent as he led the Philadelphia Orchestra through the first movement of the Second Symphony, which repeatedly teases the ears with metrical ambiguities: the first theme of the movement is in 2/4 time, the second is in 3/4, and the tension between them persists up until the final bars. Gilbert handled the tricky syncopated shifts so that they came across not as awkward transitions but as intensifications, fresh bolts of energy. The achievement was especially remarkable given that musicians often have trouble hearing each other on the stage of Verizon Hall, the acoustically uneven space where the orchestra has been playing since 2001.

At the same time, Gilbert produced a performance rich in emotion—and this was heartening to encounter in a conductor who has sometimes been criticized for being too cool in his approach. The Second is subtitled "The Four Temperaments," the four movements illustrating the choleric, phlegmatic, melancholic, and sanguine moods. The melancholy movement opens with a forty-seven-bar melodic paragraph that should unfold as a single legato phrase. Gilbert displayed another aspect of his exceptional baton technique: he swept his arms in wide, flowing, yet rhythmically incisive motions, drawing out intense lyricism while keeping the ensemble impeccably unified. (Young conductors are often discouraged from waving their arms excessively, because the beat is easily lost.) Gilbert practiced the same art on the students of the Curtis Symphony, who gave a startlingly polished concert at Carnegie Hall on February 12th; in the slow movement of the Third Symphony, the strings spoke in strikingly unanimous, heartfelt phrases. The missing element was feistiness; the Curtis players sounded, oddly, too professional. Gilbert might have reminded them of another of Nielsen's aphorisms: that great artists give their era a black eye. ♦

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THE CURRENT CINEMA

BEAMED DOWN

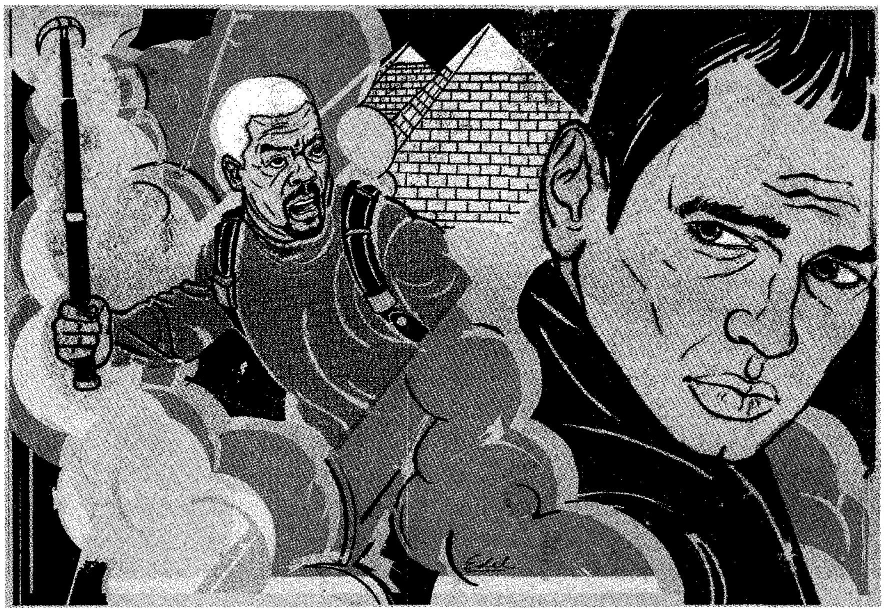
"Jumper" and "Be Kind Rewind."

BY ANTHONY LANE

Bring back James Cameron. An unlikely sentiment, I realize, given the animosity that millions still nourish toward "Titanic" and its creator, who seems to regard himself, if the 1997 Academy Awards are anything to go by, as a mixture of Moses and Erich von Stroheim. Yet there is no gainsaying his strongest work; the Cameron who made "Aliens," "The Abyss," and the first two "Terminator" films remains one of the few directors capable of shouldering an outlandish concept and bearing it onward to its coherent end. In his hands, science fiction assumes the hard, metallic sheen of plausible fact, whereas the longer I suffer each new configuration of "Spider-Man," "Fantastic Four," "Batman," and "X-Men" the more I sense a reluctance, on the part of directors, to think their narratives through, and the louder the hiss of deflation as a neat, amusing idea runs out of puff.

Nowhere is the comedown more depressing than in "Jumper," directed by Doug Liman, which features Hayden Christensen as a master of teleportation named David Rice. For those of you unfamiliar with the basics of teleporting, here's how to do it: taking your cue from Maria von Trapp, you simply remember your favorite things, or at least your favorite place on the planet, and, letting off a little *bwoompff* sound, you're there. I tried it several times in the course of this frantic film, hoping to land inside a calm sanatorium in the Swiss Alps, but no dice.

David's initial jump, when he's a teenager, leaves him beached and gasping like a fish on, of all places, the floor of the Ann Arbor public library—a witty detail, for so unbookish a film. "How does this thing work?" he asks himself. "How can I control it?" These questions are never satisfactorily answered. Instead, we ourselves leap ahead to the adult David, who by now is jumping purely for pleasure. His idea of a sweet night out is to teleport himself to London, pick up a girl, sleep with her, then breakfast the following morning atop the Sphinx, before hopping off to Fiji for a healing surf. All flesh is as grass, however, and David's delights are about to be cropped short by Roland (Samuel L. Jackson), one of the Paladins—an élite squad of killjoys, trained to hunt and destroy all Jumpers on earth. Lord knows what drives the Paladins, aside from a Calvinistic scorn of man as epicure. Once they've finished with the Jumpers, presumably, they'll get to work on the smokers.



Samuel L. Jackson and Hayden Christensen in Doug Liman's movie.

EDEL RODRIGUEZ

"Star Wars" fans will remember Hayden Christensen as the young Anakin Skywalker, or, to be accurate, as a kind of handsome void where Anakin was supposed to be. (In the new film, he and Jackson, himself a former Jedi, grapple with what looks like a sawn-off light sabre.) One day, I feel sure, the rich mantle of charisma will descend upon him, but "Jumper" is not that occasion. In any case, the fault lies with Liman and his screenwriters—David S. Goyer, Jim Uhls, and Simon Kinberg—who cheerfully beam their hero around the globe and then have no clue what to do with him. David has a wall of picture postcards in Manhattan; one glance at the location on a card, and he can spirit himself there. (Needless to say, the movie quietly drops this visualization theme when it becomes a drag.) Such restlessness, I would argue, does not ipso facto make him a dude, or a man of the world; it simply makes him an accelerated tourist, and the whole of "Jumper" comes across as vastly incurious about the cultures at its command. When David takes Millie (Rachel Bilson), a school friend from Michigan, for a dirty day out in Rome, she stands in awe before the Colosseum. "This place is amazing," she declares. "It's so cool." I wasn't expecting Ernst Gombrich, but surely three writers, among them, could inject a touch of class.

The two reasons to see "Jumper" are Michael Rooker, who plays David's father (and suggests, uncannily, what Heath Ledger might have looked like in middle age), and Jamie Bell, in the role of a fellow-Jumper named Griffin. Where David is semi-suave and hedonistic, Griffin is hurried and hirsute, zipping back to his grungy desert lair whenever danger looms. The film pretty much evaporates at the close, as if the production had to wrap early in time for lunch, and Griffin's character is left shamefully dangling, but not before he and David have enjoyed a strenuous fight, jump-cutting from war zone to road to river with every punch. The result is more or less a remake of the great scene in "Sherlock Jr.," where a dozing Buster Keaton dreams himself through a shuffled sequence of backgrounds. "Jumper" is ten times as brutal, maybe a thousand times more costly, and eighty-four years late, but it's a start.

The new Michel Gondry film, "Be Kind Rewind," is set in Passaic, New Jersey. It stars Jack Black as Jerry, a shambling, logorrheic loser who lives in a trailer and idles his days away in a local video store owned by Mr. Fletcher (Danny Glover) and staffed by the benevolent Mike (Mos Def). One day, after an unfortunate incident at a power plant next to his trailer, Jerry finds himself magnetized—these things happen, I guess—with the result that he unwittingly wipes every tape on Mr. Fletcher's shelves. The solution is perfectly obvious: Jerry and Mike will shoot their own versions of popular films, beginning with "Ghostbusters," record them onto the blank tapes, rent them out, and hope that regular customers—like the daffy Ms. Falewicz (Mia Farrow), who looks like she got wiped years ago herself—won't notice the difference.

This is a charming conceit, designed as a paean to the ramshackle; sadly, every minute of Gondry's film is irrefutable proof that charm is not enough. The rule seems to be that whenever he directs other people's scripts—as he did with "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind," written by Charlie Kaufman—he is able to negotiate a truce, or even a merger, between the logical and the fantastic, whereas when he writes his own material, as in "The Science of Sleep" and "Be Kind Rewind," anything that smacks of common sense is rejected as a gross inconvenience. To take the most basic of objections: how many video-only stores do you know? It would hardly have stretched the budget to set the action in the late nineteen-eighties, when video was rampant; in fact, the new movie has the flimsiness of a comedy from that era (remember the robot in "Short Circuit," touched off by a lightning strike?), and half of the films that Mike and Jerry seek to revitalize are of similar vintage. If you can think of nothing more hilarious than Jack Black strapping on used auto parts and pretending to be Robocop, then here is the movie you want.

The outcome is a strangely sundered one, torn between the claims of nostalgia and a desperate bid to seduce the YouTube generation. There are thousands of people doing what Mike and Jerry do, but few of them would even know what a video was, preferring to shoot on digital and post their spoofs online. This user-generated content, as it is called, marks either a long-overdue democratization of the arts or, if you prefer, a mass proliferation of the mediocre, and Gondry had the opportunity to rise above it by crafting a thoroughly professional fable about amateurs. He blew his chance, and most of "Be Kind Rewind" feels as silly and undisciplined as the mini-movies cooked up by its hapless heroes. These, incidentally, we are invited to view in their entirety by visiting the movie's Web site. Thanks, but I'll pass.

Given that nod to current trends, the film's finale comes across as a willful throwback. One evening, Mike and Jerry's last production is shown to the community: projected onto a screen, it grows visible through the window, and everyone throngs in the street to watch, perched on stoops like kids in an Andy Hardy picture. The moment is pinched, I suspect, from a scene in "Cinema Paradiso," when Philippe Noiret projected an old movie onto a wall of a town square, but that was a miraculous visitation in a place adrift from the wide world, and it was beautifully spliced into the sentimental efficiency of the whole story. Twenty-first-century New Jersey, though, is another matter, and if Gondry really thinks that he can will his movie, not to mention his audience, back into a state of innocence, he's kidding himself.

Hats off to Mos Def, then, who is plainly unbeguiled by the folly around him—you can hear it in his voice, which barely swells beyond a sleepy murmur, as if he had just rolled out of bed. No such luck for Jack Black, who, perhaps because Gondry was too busy giggling over his own script, appears not to have been directed at all. Some of his early scenes, after the electrical surge, are painfully thrown away, and once again my wishful thinking drifted to Buster Keaton; just imagine what tremendous, gag-pulsing value he would have got from the sight of a magnetized man. A comedy without one foot on the ground is no more than a flight of fancy, as directionless as a balloon; the master clowns of silent cinema knew that, and so does Mr. Fletcher, the gravid elder statesman of this film. As he says to Mike and Jerry, "I appreciate your creativity, but let's be realistic for a second." Be kind. Erase. ♦

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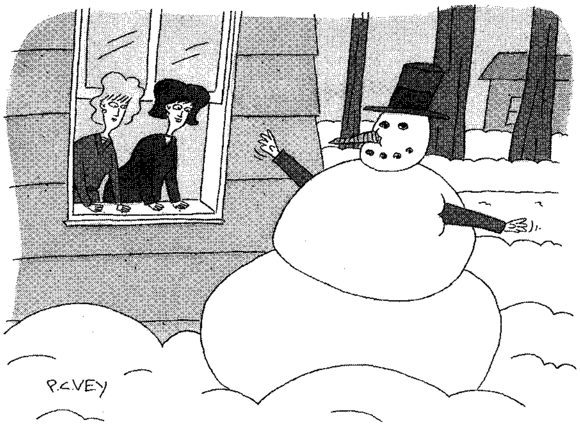
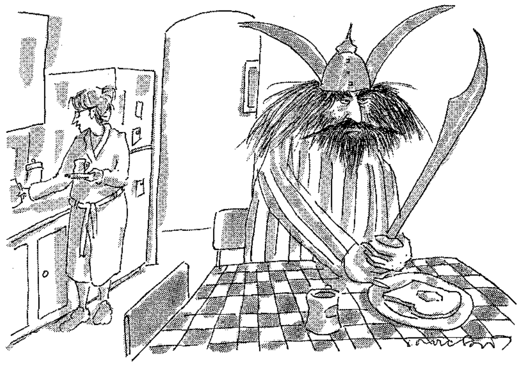
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Jack Ziegler, must be received by Sunday, February 24th. Finalists in the February 4th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the March 10th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"It's all the witness-protection program would offer him."
Suzanne Geba, San Diego, Calif.



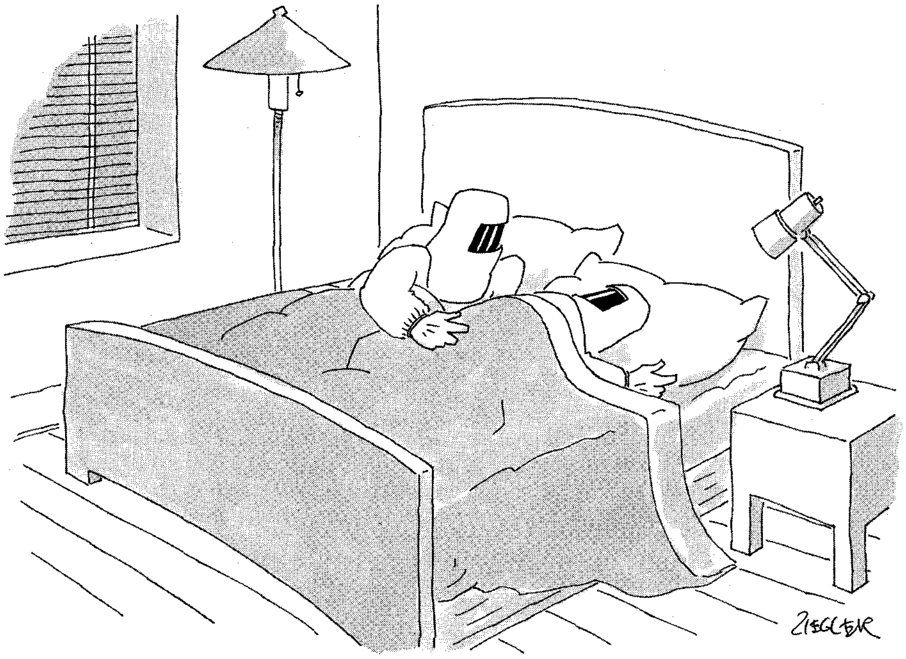
THE FINALISTS

"We're all out of the blood of your enemies.
You'll have to settle for marmalade."
Jason Beck, Los Angeles, Calif.

"If you didn't want crusts, you should have said so."
Vic Comello, Franklin Park, Ill.

"How many cubicles will you conquer today, hon?"
Scott Corlett, San Francisco, Calif.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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